Bodily Textures : Generic Inscriptions And Ideological Markings In Russian And Romanian Fantastic Literature

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BODILY TEXTURES.
GENERIC INSCRIPTIONS AND IDEOLOGICAL MARKINGS IN RUSSIAN AND ROMANIAN FANTASTIC LITERATURE

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BODILY TEXTURES.

GENERIC INSCRIPTIONS AND IDEOLOGICAL MARKINGS IN RUSSIAN AND ROMANIAN FANTASTIC LITERATURE.

Mikhail Bulgakov, Andrei Platonov and Mircea Cartarescu

The body of the text--the body in the text. The relationship of reality with fiction and of fiction with its generic embodiments creates a space for inquiring into the way in which the body of the text--the genre--affects and effects the shapes of the body in the text (the embodied characters, the body politic, etc.) after responding to a "genre" of reality: ideology.

As Ihab Hassan wrote, ideology, utopia and fantasy are present both as agents of change and as forms of literature, my thesis examining the ways in which these three elements interact. Studying the genre in which the critique of ideology chooses to embody itself is meaningful as

> the limits of ideology are made visible when ideology is forced into a form not of its choosing as when it must conform to the generic requirements of a particular literary mode[1].

I will mainly use the analysis of ideology provided by John Thompson, Fredric Jameson and Clifford Geertz, who consider ideology within a larger cultural, social and historical framework.

Mikhail Bulgakov, Andrei Platonov in the 40s, and Mircea Cartarescu in the 80s, wrote in times when socialist realism was the literary norm. Their works inhabit this norm as the starting point of their critique upon it, by ridiculing its language and its types of characters (Platonov) or creating alternative spaces through magic or introspection (Bulgakov and Cartarescu). While Bulgakov's and Platonov's works are

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[1]David Hawkes, Ideology, Routledge, London and New York, p.122.

full-fledged novels dealing with the everyday reality of Russian life in Moscow and respectively, Chevengur, Cartarescu's book Nostalgia is a collection of five stories linked by common characters and the same preoccupation with the inner space and its potential for transformation.

In fantastic literature the negotiations between reality and fiction are important as the "real" acquires multiple meanings which are present mainly in political and literary shapes. These shapes--like the "new man" figure, the doctrine of socialist realism--are the ones to which the texts react, reversing or distorting their rules, which become instrumental in creating both the body of and the body in the text. The textual negotiation among the different, even divergent, types of bodily norms (the fantastic/realist body, the bourgeois/communist body, the female/male body) leads to the creation of *the fantastic body*. This is the specific body that appears in fantastic texts as the product of distortion and rearrangement, the critical body which discloses the absurdities and the gaps in ideologies.

My thesis is provisionally structured in two main chapters. The first is considering the **body of the text** by providing a working contextual definition of the fantastic and a discussion of the relationship among imagination, fantasy and ideology. Here I consider the main theorists of the genre--Tvetan Todorov, Erik Rabkin, Christine Brooke-Rose and Rosemary Jackson. I also analyse the relationship of fantasy with different notions of reality--in literary terms (considering literary currents like modernism, symbolism, futurism and, in Cartarescu's case, postmodernism) and social terms aiming at disclosing the mechanism of producing the fantastic topoi. In the second chapter, **"The body in the text"**, I will use Elisabeth Grosz's distinction between the lived and the inscribed body[2] to discuss the result of the overlappings between different inscriptions and the positioning of bodies in space and time and the emergence of the grotesque as instrument and result of fantastic reactions.

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[2] Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies and Knowledges" in Space, Time, and Perversion. Essays on the Politics of Bodies, Routledge, 1995, p.32.

I will argue for a contextual non-escapist definition of fantasy, a definition I will use to examine the effects of the dominant ideological discourse and socialist realistic aesthetic and the way these are overturned by fantastic texts. Finally, my research aims at disclosing the mechanisms by which the fantastic body is constructed as a reaction to a specific reality context and the way it acquires its subversive potential.

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

MM	MIKHAIL BULGAKOV, *THE MASTER AND MARGARITA, PENGUIN, LONDON, 1997*
CHEV	ANDREI PLATONOV, *CEVENGUR, CARTEA ROMANEASCA, BUCHAREST, 1990*
NOST	MIRCEA CARTARESCU, *NOSTALGIA, HUMANITAS, BUCHAREST, 1993.*

All references to these works are quoted paranthetically in the text.

1

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a comparative analysis of three books belonging to different time and place coordinates: Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, Andrei Platonov's *Chevengur* and *Nostalgia* by Mircea Cartarescu. These three works are not related merely because they were censured in some degree or another and were published in their integrity some time after they had been written, thus pointing to dissent and ideological misfitness. Being placed together through the arbitrary act of a scholar, they come to communicate mostly through representing in their characters the features of an incomplete kind of subjectivity, by pointing to a possible chain of reactions to the cultural, social and political environment which backgrounds them and through expressing this chain through different narrative techniques. This chain of reactions articulates itself in time and space. It is a posterior critical construct that will help us understand the evolution of a genre as well as other cultural and mentality related aspects.

The socialist social and aesthetic construct was not a system which favoured the formation of a living flexible subjectivity. The communist utopia was the aim which objectified any living entity towards the completion of the ideal. In between the inscribed subject of the norm and the lived subject of desire, overlapping with the realm of the abject, in some territories not yet chartered, there was an incomplete subjectivity. Incomplete because of the conflict between the fact that it did not want to completely subject itself to power in order to self-preserve and the knowledge that it could be a legitimate subject only if it accepted power. Judith Butler defines the process of subjection as being two-sided: "'subjection' signifies the process of becoming subordinated to power as well as the process of becoming a subject . . . the subject is initiated through a primary submission to power."[1] The forms the subject takes are in the content of the gesture of subjection, otherwise that subjectivity is not acknowledged as legitimate but outside the limits of recognition.

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[1] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), 2.

In the present analysis I am trying to trace the strategic differences among the three authors in the narrative, structural and linguistic means they use in order to refer to an oppressive reality at different points in its development. This research does not intend to become an archive of literary attitudes. It is only a slightly patterned trip through different world-views.

Starting from the *Master and Margarita,* whose world is structured on two levels that articulate in order to give each other meaning, the analysis goes to Platonov's *Chevengur*, which illustrates an attitude towards utopia and a language that creates a universe that slides upon itself. Mircea Cartarescu's *Nostalgia* is a return to a double universe but this time it is the articulation of the external life with the inner psychological one. The analysis of this transition from a structure characterised by duality, through a universe which distances itself from the world and back to a dual narrative plane is one of the main concerns of this thesis.

All these books create a type of character who is constructed to be on the borderline. And it is not only the border between the real and the metaphysical, or the psychological, or merely the ideological. Their subjectivity belongs to a realm which contains elements of different contrasting territories which would interrelate without conflict had it not been for the territories beyond the border which claim possession. Actually without the political this border would not exist. These characters are created by this conflict and they become the borderline. ". . . the border separates two sides only by being on both sides at once."[2] The conflicts that take place on these borders are the subject of these novels.

I will use different critical tools from Bakhtin's theories of genre and the heteroglosic, to Wolfgang Iser's reader-response criticism in order to point to the relationship between reader and text. I will go further by using more recent theoretical developments, like Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject, Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz's insights into the representation of the body as well as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notions of rhizome and machinic assemblages. The wide array of instruments used for constructing this analysis is a way of pointing to different points of entry into the text without exhausting them.

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[2]Jeffrey S. Librett, Foreword to Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 1997), xii.

CHAPTER 2
THE GENRE IN-BETWEEN. STRATEGIES FOR TEXTUAL EXISTENCE. EXPANDING THE LIMITS OF INTERPRETATION.

2.1. The Genre.

The present chapter will analyse the main features of the fantastic genre and will show the way it functioned in the periods that are the focus of this paper: the early Soviet and late communist period. The two periods are linked by the presence of common genres and themes. These are treated in a different way depending on their time frame, pointing to the evolution of narratology but also to different ways of relating--both aesthetically and psychologically--to an oppressive reality. In the present chapter I will mainly use Bakhtin's theory of the genres for its insights into the way genre as a formal category has the power to speak about and comment on the world construction of a given period. I will try to give an account of how, in the periods discussed, the fantastic acts as a supplement meant to displace the central literary forms, through movements of apparent adherence or visible deviation, for the purpose of transformation and distortion. This is because one of the questions that has come up is how the fantastic genre, with such a potential for undermining and distortion, was allowed to exist, even marginally, in societies which attempted to control ways of thinking in general and views opposite to or critical of them in particular. Was this genre in the position of the "king's fool" or did its strategies go even further than this function--important in its way--but conventional in its means?

The choice of a certain genre is not meaningless. As Gary Saul Morson states when considering one of Bakhtin's main ideas, "genres are really forms of thinking".[3] Thus one of the main contributions of the formalist school was to perform a shift from viewing genre as a set of taxonomic features to seeing it as "a system of meaning production that is crucial to assumptions of literary ontology, performance and evolution".[4] Genres do not only point to the mere preference of a writer for a certain form, but they bespeak of the fact that the

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[3]Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin.Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 280.

[4] Greg Carleton, "Genre in Socialist Realism", Slavic Review, Vol.53, 1994, 993.

content meant to be expressed takes its best and most productive form within the boundaries of a given generic structure.

Genres are important for the way in which they treat their content but also for their importance in the process of reader-response. Genres point to the conventions the readers should use in order to decipher a certain piece of writing. According to Fredric Jameson, genre

> is itself a social institution, something like a social contract in which we agree to respect certain rules about the appropriate use of the piece of language in question.[5]

Morson states that "they [genres] allow the reader to view the world in a specific way . . . Genres (of literature and speech) throughout the centuries of their life accumulate forms of seeing and interpreting particular aspects of the world".[6]

For Bakhtin, meaning is "neither located entirely *in* the text, nor is it identical with the author intentions". Also, it is not entirely the product of interpretation.[7] It is a combination of all these--writer, text, reader--plus the potentiality existent in the genre as such, potentiality that reveals itself given a content rich enough to suggest multiple interpretations across time and space. According to Bakhtin, as presented by Morson:

> Having accumulated centuries of conceptualisation, and carrying wisdom irreducible to any set of propositions, genres carry potentials that great writers may sense but which are ever beyond the capacity of any writer to ascertain specifically.[8]

In the works proposed for analysis it would be useful to introduce the differentiation described by E.D Hirsch. He asserts that one of the most important choices of the writer is that of the genre of his work. This is because "All understanding of verbal meaning . . . is necessarily genre-bound".[9] He introduces the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic genres:

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[5] Fredric Jameson, "Beyond the cave. Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism", in *The Ideology of Theory. Essays. 1971-1986,* Syntax of History, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 116.

[6] Bakhtin in Morson, *Mikhail Bakhtin. Creation of a Prosaics,* 285.

[7] Ibid., 284 -5

[8] Ibid., 285.

> An extrinsic genre is a wrong guess, an intrinsic genre a correct one. One of the main tasks of interpretation can be summarised as the critical rejection of extrinsic genres in the search for the intrinsic genre of a text.[10]

This differentiation enables us to see what lies behind the use of the socialist realist conventions, to actually see that there is something behind these conventions employed only formally and which at the level of meaning provide only a weak impression of coherence and depth.

I will not go as far with my analysis as to consider the unknown potential of the genre but I will take into account the image that the collective--let's call it literary--imaginary has constructed for the fantastic genre, as this might be important for the way this genre managed to exist and perform.[11] Coming from a position sometimes considered by the uninformed reader as marginal, as a literary domain dealing with trivial, sometimes childish matters, fantasy might have found its way unnoticed in order to occupy an important position through the message that it finally managed to render. From this point of view fantasy acts as the extrinsic genre meant to deceive the eye of the naive censor-- if there is one that naive. On the other hand, when the work analysed is supposed to be socialist realist, fantasy is also recognised as the intrinsic genre.

It is not only Bakhtin who stressed the importance of genre and form in general for the literature of the Soviet period. In an article analysing Abram Terz's (Andrei Sinyavskii's) work, Erika Haber uses the notion of "fantastic realism" in order to comment upon the fantastic nature of the aforementioned period. She asserts that

> the fantastic found in fantastic realism is not that of ghost stories and alien civilizations common to escapist literature but rather creative flights of metafictional fancy, structural transgression and the defamiliarization of the

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[9] E.D. Hirsch in Adena Rosmarin *The Power of Genre* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 26.

[10] Hirsch in ibid., 28-29.

[11] Stephen Lovell, in an article devoted to the reception of Bulgakov's *Master an Margarita* by the Russian public, focuses on the reader's difficulty in assigning a genre to the work and integrating it into their world-view. "Back in 1967, the immediate problem was how to integrate Bulgakov into accepted Russian and Soviet literary traditions. This is best observed in the discussion of the novel's genre: it was variously described as satire, menippea, parody, fantastic tale, adventure story, science fiction". Further on, he states that "*Master i Margarita* opens up reading as a personal--not shared universal--activity, and hence it subverts the myth of the culturally homogeneous 'mass Soviet reader.'", "Bulgakov as Soviet Culture", The Slavonic and East European Review, Vol. 76, No.1 (1998), 31, 41.

> familiar. Consequently, both reality and the fantastic are more the result of style and form than of content.[12]

Further on, Haber underlines a very important element in any analysis of fantastic literature, an element meant to clear up the critical pursuit, both conceptually and methodologically:

> one must use caution when speaking of either "reality" or "the fantastic" in literature since both depend on the referentiality of words for their creation. The realistic world is no more "real" than is the "fantastic" one; both are fictional literary constructs.[13]

It is not only the genre of realism that "adapts itself" to the Soviet environment. Other genres also have to adapt to a new historical and aesthetic situation. Genres are not frozen prescriptive structures but they alter together with the literary texts themselves. According to Adena Rosmarin: "genre is not, as is commonly thought, a class but, rather, a classifying statement. It is therefore itself a text. It is writing about writing".[14] Moreover, she adds that

> a genre is chosen or defined to fit neither a historical nor a theoretical reality but to serve a pragmatic end. It is meant to solve a critical problem that typically involves justifying the literary text's acknowledged but seemingly inexplicable value.[15]

If we were to support the extrinsic genre of Platonov, for example, we will end up with one more interpretation claiming that *Chevengur* writes in a truthful manner about the construction of communism. But one has to identify the misconception and see through the formal devices employed.

Fantasy is not a pure genre. Its features have not been firmly defined, although several attempts have been made. One can describe more or less accurately the development of the genre over a limited period of time, like, for example, the Gothic period, one of the richest stages of this genre. However, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to come up with a definition that would work for all periods and all types of fantasy. This is partly because the fantastic draws its energies from the specific period in which it functions and its topoi are

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[12] Erika Haber, "In Search of the Fantastic in Abram Tertz's Fantastic Realism", Slavic and East European Journal, Vol. 42, No. 2 (1998); 254.
[13] Ibid., 167.

[14] Rosmarin, *The Power of Genre*, 47.

[15] Ibid., 49-50.

different in time and space. Also a lot depends on its relationship with empirical reality and, in the context of my paper, with the idea of realism. Erika Haber, taking over one of Boris Tomashevskii's arguments, also points to a simple element that adds to the structural importance of fantasy: "Boris Tomashevski states that merely creating the illusion of the fantastic in a text makes it susceptible to dual interpretation".[16] It is up to the reader to identify or not the different meanings that potentially exist in the text because the fantastic works in a close relationship with the reader, it exists only when recognised by a reader.

In the following section I will review the main theories and definitions of the fantastic in order to give an account of how the field has developed and in what way my study relates and can make use of these theoretical statements. I will employ the structural framework provided by Katherine Hume in her book *Fantasy and Mimesis. Responses to Reality in Western Literature.*

Definitions of fantasy speak about the relationship of the fantastic text to a concept of reality that differs from text to text, trying to give an account of what makes a text fantastic.

Eric Rabkin starts from the "reality" of the text, saying that for the fantastic to appear it is necessary that the ground rules of the narrative world be diametrically contradicted and this contradiction be recognised by the characters, be an "anti-expected" element. The fantastic is present in the respective text at all times, because it is not the reality of the world that is contradicted but only the reality of the text which acquires validity, the fantastic existing across time and space.

There is an aspect in Rabkin's work that I would like to emphasise at the expense of the main argument (of contradicting the ground rules of the narrative), and that is the importance of the text for a specific period of time and its relationship with the environment surrounding it. This relationship becomes visible in the use of language which can in many ways create an alternative universe, in the breaks from logic and in the apparent function of escape that the fantastic text may embrace. And I use the word "apparent" because escape is only apparent, as the function of the texts is to actually point to the culturally disturbing

[16] Haber, "In Search of the Fantastic", 255.

elements, to foreground them and not escape from them. As Jonathan Dollimore said, "what a culture designates as alien, utterly other and different, is never so".[17] The works of Bulgakov and Platonov build part of their fantastic charge by contradicting the *norm*, action which could be considered in itself "unimaginable", given the possible consequences. Even a simple activity like singing can appear fantastic if the environment where it takes place excludes it. Considering this, the fantastic can exist without the necessary presence of the supernatural (in the most common understanding of the word).

In his turn, Tzvetan Todorov starts from the reality/world of the text, which has to be considered as a world of living beings, as "real":

> the fantastic requires the fulfilment of three conditions. First the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to *hesitate* between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character and at the same time as the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as "poetic" interpretations.

Commenting upon Todorov's work, Christine Brooke-Rose underlines the fact that he sees the fantastic as a historically narrow genre, one that occurred in the period of the Gothic novel and shortly after it, due to several factors like the 19th century taboos and the use that psychoanalysis made of fantastic themes.[18]

Restrained by his own definition, Todorov seems to overlook the existence of the fantastic in other periods and the fact that fantastic themes are not the same, that they change according to the context of the period and to the elements that are considered culturally frustrating. Also, it is somehow difficult to apply his definition to texts in which the split real-supernatural is not visible, where the fantastic relies on language effects, like in Platonov, for example, where we can no longer speak of the fantastic as embedded in the plot. Cartarescu, as well, plays with the psychological side of the subject, the side that is

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[17] Jonathan Dollimore, "The Cultural Politics of Perversion: Augustine, Shakespeare, Freud and Foucault", Textual Practice 4, No.2 (Summer 1990), 191.

[18] Christine Brooke-Rose, *The Rhetoric of the Unreal. Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 64.

already one stretch away from immediately perceptible reality, but still it cannot be labelled as supernatural.

But we can also take into account Todorov's own comments in *Genres in Discourse*. He states that "a new genre is always the transformation of an earlier one, or of several: by inversion, by displacement, by combination".[19] Thus one can admit of a change in the thematic range of the fantastic due to the evolution of the genre in time and space.

Susan Rubin Suleiman also comments on Todorov's restrictive definition of genre, arguing that supporting such historical simultaneity between the apparition of the genre and its theoretisation narrows the possibility of invention and development and also conditions reading and makes impossible the evolution of new theoretical constructs which might clarify some aspects of generic functioning.

> If we call "genres" only those classes of texts that have been perceived *as such* "in the course of history" . . . that means that no new generic constructions are allowed to operate on texts of the past. (Pushed a little further, the definition might imply that the perception of the genre must precede the appearance of individual works--in other words, that a writer always writes with a recognised generic model in mind)[20].

She supports the idea that great works of art are characterised by generic instability, that "they lend themselves to being analysed in terms of more than one genre, and at the same time no analysis exclusively in terms of genre is sufficient to account for them completely".[21] (The question here is how one can judge from this point of view postmodern works, in which intertextuality and the play of genres reign supreme)

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[19] Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 15.

[20] Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions. The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 14.

[21] Ibid., 8.

Leaving behind strictly textual considerations, Harold Bloom enlarges the scope of the definition of fantasy by introducing the reality of the world external to the text, creating a three element definition:[22]

> fantasy, as a belated version of romance, promises an absolute freedom from belatedness, from the anxieties of literary influence and origination, yet this promise is shadowed always by a psychic over-determination in the form itself of fantasy, that puts the stance of freedom into severe question.[23]

This definition excludes the reader as an active element in the decoding of the text, in recognising the aim of the fantastic discourse. For my purposes, the reader-writer complicity is necessary in order for the text to acquire full meanings. The relationship between the text and its narrator on the one hand and the reader on the other hand is one of the elements that builds a genre. A fantastic text cannot exist without the presence of the reader who should have the ability to decode the cultural signals the text sends in different forms that can belong to a known ontology or not. However, the reader has to discover the link between his own ontology and that of the text, as this link is always causal. As Todorov states:

> It is because genres exist as an institution that they function as "horizons of expectation" for readers and as "models of writing" for authors... genres communicate indirectly with the society where they are operative through their institutionalization... like any other institution genres bring to light the constitutive features of the society to which they belong.

The definitions of W.R. Irwin, Marcel Schneider and Ann Swinfen focus on the communication between author-work-audience. Their analysis works in two stages: a first one that concentrates on the formal requirements of the work and a second one that involves the author and the audience:

> a narrative is a fantasy if it presents the persuasive establishment and development of an impossibility, an arbitrary construct of the mind with all under the control of logic and rhetoric to make fact appear non-fact, is essential

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[22] Kathryn Hume uses five elements in order to classify the definitions of fantasy, starting from the scheme proposed by M.H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp*. These are: the work, the artist, the audience, world 1 (the world surrounding the author), world 2 (the world surrounding the reader). *Fantasy and Mimesis. Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Methuen,1984).

[23] Bloom, in Hume, 14.

> to fantasy. In this effort, writer and reader knowingly enter upon a conspiracy of intellectual subversiveness, that is, upon a game.[24]

This model was developed in relation with the genre of science fiction and it is too rigid for my purposes. The relationship between the fantastic world and reality need not be one of parallelism. On the contrary. The fantastic world builds itself within and from the world as we know it. It is not a separate construct that needs to legitimate itself and become plausible. Its results are even more striking when it manages to produce its effect without creating a parallel universe. What is of interest in this definition is the use of Shklovskii's concept of "ostraneniye" (defamiliarisation) in order to define the main requirement of the audience.

Five element definitions are present in the works of theorists like J.R. Tolkien and Rosemary Jackson. Tolkien's definition insists on the idea of escape from the ugliness of the industrialised society and it is mainly applied to science fiction. On the other hand, Jackson argues that fantasy is

> a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss . . . fantastic literature points to or suggests the basis upon which cultural order rests, for it opens up, for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems. *The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'.*[25] (my italics)

Fantasy is structured by its search for what is arbitrarily missing from reality. There are signifiers to name these missing elements but they cannot be used. Thus new names, shapes or frameworks need to be found in order for them to reappear. But they are cultural taboos that need to be expressed in some roundabout way. The literary work needs to defamiliarize these elements so that attention can be drawn to them. The same process of defamiliarization can be used for elements present in one's empirical reality that need to be destabilized in order to point to their true meanings.

The definition Katherine Hume proposes takes into account the two impulses that she considers basic for the existence of literature: *mimesis*, "felt as the desire to imitate, to describe events, people, situations, and objects with such verisimilitude that others can share

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[24] W.R. Irwin in Hume, 15.
[25] Rosemary Jackson in Hume, 17.

your experience"[26] and *fantasy*, "the desire to change givens and reality, or the need for metaphoric images that will bypass the audience's verbal defences".[27] In the literature I have chosen I intend to analyse the ways the two impulses have to work together. The novels aim at disclosing the true shapes of reality but can only do this by taking the side route of fantasy, by the use of unusual signifiers that are not surrounded by undesired cultural baggage. It needs to break through the ideological construct that aims at presenting empirical reality in a coherent way. In order to achieve that coherence the ideological fiction needs to erase here and there, to replace or distort some elements. Thus the reality it describes is not Reality anymore. Then what does fantasy do? It paradoxically attempts a return to this Reality, or at least it tries to make visible the tabooed elements. Through an apparent departure from reality fantasy effects a return to it. It is interesting that it does not offer an alternative fiction of totality but points to the fact that such structures are actually complete through omission and silencing.

Hume puts her definition in a nutshell by stating that *fantasy and the activities producing it go beyond the text.* [28] This is a statement meant to avoid the generic partition of fantasy as a specific literary form, closed upon itself with no link with reality or importance for the collective imaginary. The aim of this paper is to show how a specific genre is used as a gesture of departure from an oppressive norm, as a formal as well as content-related critique of exactly opposite generic requirements.

Another interesting aspect which can intervene in the analysis of fantasy is its relationship with psychoanalysis. The latter has acted as both an instrument in the critical analysis of fantasy (especially for the Gothic and Victorian periods which easily lend themselves to a psychoanalytical approach) but also as a rival in exploring the limits of the self. In the modern world, psychoanalysis is used as a narrative model, it is more of a structural than a narrative pattern. One of the strongest figures in making the link between literature in general and psychoanalysis was Sigmund Freud. In his essay with the same

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[26] Hume, 20.

[27] Ibid., 20.

[28] Ibid., 24.

name he introduces the notion of "the uncanny", the English version of the German "das unheimliche" which literally means "unhomely". According to Freud the "uncanny" is "nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the processes of repression".[29] More generally

> an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes[30].

Freud mentions that there is a difference between the uncanny as it appears in real life and as it is represented in literature. The categories overlap but the domain of the literary uncanny includes and exceeds that of the real uncanny. "The contrast between what has been repressed and what has been surmounted cannot be transposed on to the uncanny in fiction without profound modification; for the realm of phantasy depends for its effect on the fact that its content is not submitted to reality-testing".[31] There seems to be even in Freud an attempt to discourage direct, unquestioning interpretation of literature through the prism of psychoanalysis. This is because fiction may find its inspiration in psychological processes, but by fictionalizing it can distort them. It is no longer the play psyche-reality. In fiction reality is bracketed and its rules are suspended.

These definitions are interesting to us because they support our view of the fantastic as acquiring shape out of the "abject", the repressed content of a culture. Although our view does not take a concrete psychoanalytical turn, it can still make use of a field of research closely related to literature and to the human psyche (which sometimes both have as object of analysis). However, our working definition of fantasy does not regard this genre as a mere outlet for the cultural repressed. It is more of an active instance, a cultural field aiming at activating the imaginative powers of society in order to point to certain discrepancies at work within it. It does not act as mere "carnival", as compensation for oppression. This is proved by the fact that not all kinds of fantasy have been widely

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[29] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", in *Art and Literature* (London: Penguin Books, 1953, 1985), 363-4
[30] Ibid., 366.

[31] Ibid., 373.

accepted by the institution of power. It was more the case of the fantastic marvellous, as Rosemary Jackson asserts, to be accepted as an act of compensation, "an activity which sustains cultural order by making up for society's lacks".[32]

2.2 Socialist realism.

Fantasy also shapes itself in response to the literary environment against which it is placed. In the present case, the foregrounding aesthetic is that of socialist realism. Socialist realism, a doctrine imposed by the communist party and approved by the first congress of the Soviet Writers' Union (1934) was a set of guiding principles for literary activity in the first society building socialism.[33] According to its practitioners

> socialist realism, the basic method employed by Soviet artistic literature and literary criticism, demands from the writer an authentic, historically specific depiction of reality in its revolutionary development. This authenticity and historical specificity in the depiction of reality should be combined with the task of ideologically reshaping and educating the toilers in the spirit of socialism.[34]

According to such critics as Marc Slonim, "Socialist Realism negated human limitations and avoided the problem of death and the human condition in the universe".[35] It had a clear function and a set aim. Soviet literature excluded psychological complexity and the possibility for tragedy.

The three main features of socialist realism, as described by Geoffrey Hosking, were that:

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[32] Rosemary Jackson in Cornwell, 215.

[33] Geoffrey Hosking, *Beyond Socialist Realism. Soviet Fiction since Ivan Denisovich* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980), 3.

[34] A. Zhdanov in ibid., 3.

[35] Marc Slonim in ibid., 2.

1. it was *narodnyi* (popular)--its subject matter reflects the life of common people in a way that is readily accessible to them.

2. it was *ideinyi*—it reflects the mature, correct and fully formed ideology of the author, for otherwise it could not play its educative role.

3. it was *partiinyi*--imbued with the ideals of the party.[36]

These characteristics come as a result of a feature specific to the formation of genres. According to Todorov a

> society chooses and codifies the acts that correspond most closely to its ideology; this is why the existence of certain genres in one society, their absence in another, are revelatory of that ideology and allows us to establish it more or less confidently.[37]

Fredric Jameson finds the notion of genre particularly useful for Marxist text analysis as it performs a mediatory function which "allows the co-ordination of the individual text with the twin diachronic perspective of the history of forms and the evolution of social life".[38]

Both Bulgakov's and Platonov's novels respond in a critical way to the revolutionary or proletarian nature of the socialist realist doctrine. Platonov's novels *Kotlovan* and *Chevengur* treat in symbolic terms the party's programme for collectivisation and industrialisation. Language in these novels has been reduced to mere propaganda argot.[39] Platonov uses a deliberately rough style--full of beurocratese, Soviet clichés are used to point to the degraded idiom of communist ideology. Iosif Brodsky described Platonov's language by saying that he

> speaks of a nation which in a sense has become a victim of its own language; or, more precisely, he speaks of this language itself--which turns out to be capable of generating a fictive world and then falling into grammatical dependence on it.[40]

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[36] Ibid., 4.

[37] Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, 19.

[38] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1981, 1989), 105.

[39] Edward J. Brown, *Russian Literature Since the Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1963, 1982), 235.

In Platonov's novel, the aim of ideology to stop the sliding of the signifier and to reduce the semantic abundance[41] through ideological prescription and mimesis is presented as a moment of cessation of communication.

Greg Carleton argues that in socialist realism genres lose their textual function, they are no longer semantically important, pointing to certain interpretative strategies. The importance of the genre is overruled by the domain of topoi, "situated above any one text or genre".[42] Carleton states that the abhorrence of socialist realism for experimentation and its preference for fixity and repetition, has lead to the reification of topoi, which become the dominant feature of a text. The function of the text becomes more important that the possible meanings its contents have to convey. The effect is that

> a fictional or hypothetical character and a real person can stand side by side and reinforce each other without palpable tension . . . if an acknowledged fiction reproduces the accepted topoi then it, just as any non-fictional text, can function as a valid simulacrum of "what has occurred".[43]

The larger consequence is that "different discursive modes can and do serve the same rhetorical purpose, though each mode may be formally identified as history, fiction or children's tale, for that matter".[44] This could be one of the answers for the initial question of this chapter, a way of explaining the persistence of the fantastic genre.

If we consider together with Julia Kristeva that genres are "imperfect semiological systems"[45] it is plausible that in fantasy the structure and the typology of the normative genre are preserved, the forms are the same, but--trying to profit from the deficiencies in the semiological structure-- these forms are filled with contents that break the monological discourse and open it up to the effects of menippean discourse. Kristeva, who comments on the works of Bakhtin, writes that "Put together as an exploration of the body, dreams and

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[40] Iosif Brodsky in ibid., 236.

[41] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter. On the discursive limits of sex* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993), 208.

[42] Carleton, 998.

[43] Ibid., 206.

[44] Ibid., 206.

[45] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66.

language, this [menippean] writing grafts onto the topical . . . Its discourse exteriorizes political and ideological conflicts of the moment".[46] The genres of the novel and fantasy seem to have found a good meeting point in the idea of the dialogical narrative. According to Bakhtin, the novel has inherent dialogic possibilities that can be exploited by the fantastic, even when these possibilities are not activated or they are consciously backgrounded. Bakhtin states that the modern novel "injects social heteroglossia into the body of the novel and leaves to it the orchestration of its meaning, frequently giving up altogether any pure and unmediated authorial discourse".[47] Although socialist realism has been compared to a neo-classic genre in its attempts at purity, its historical position in both the history of the world as well as literary history, can guide us to the conclusion that it cannot reach complete generic and thematic purity. Greg Carleton commented:

> socialist realism can be seen as a system based on clearly defined and delimited genres, and these genres exist in a strict hierarchy. Eighteenth century literature certainly provides a comfortable metaphor because it invokes a picture of restraint, stasis, clarity and rigidity, in other words, those modifiers that so often characterize the monologic tendency of socialist realism. In formal terms, descriptions of this kind make sense if we wish to mark the system's inherent conservatism . . . But if we wish to understand how the system functioned on its own terms, then we may find that our conventional understanding of genre is insufficient for the material at hand[48].

Given the degree of development of the literary art at the time of the Russian communist revolution, a return to less complex narratological structures and to "flat" characters is a conscious choice that points to the systematic desire to transmit a certain message while obstructing others. Heteroglossia is still there, acting its role in the position of an intrinsic genre, while monoglossia is displayed for the extrinsic reader. It was also Bakhtin who said:

> Genre lives in the present, but it always remembers the past, its beginnings. Genre is the representative of creative memory in the process of literary evolution, which is precisely why genre is capable of guaranteeing the unity and the continuity of this evolution[49].

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[46] Ibid., 83.

[47] M. Bakhtin in Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin. The Dialogical Principle*, Theory and History of Literature, Volume 13 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 77.

[48] Carleton, 1001.

Contemporary discussions upon the nature and evolution of socialist realism focus around the concepts of openness and closure of the system, often trying to argue that the dissolution of the closure was marked in the genre at the very moments when it reached its crystallisation.[50] This is partly due to the fact that the very theory supporting Socialist Realism was characterised by an internal contradiction. While it asked for a narrative to present a hero fighting for a definite end, it also required an open ending pointing towards the utopian future, this way creating two time lines[51]. Thus it became difficult to both create a strong narrative structure and still give the impression of representing freedom.

These contemporary discussions are also marked by the evolution of the theoretical framework towards post-structuralism, looking, in Derridean terms, for the element wherefrom the decentering of the closed system had started. Derrida himself argued for the concept concerning the "contamination of genres", stating that there is a law of impurity at the very heart of the genre, or a principle of contamination which prevents the genre from preserving its structure unchanged in time and space.[52] The moment a "law of the genre" is instituted, there begins the sliding. It is up to the critic to discover these elements, social, cultural or political, that cause the sliding to begin. As Derrida states:

> Every text participates in one or several genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging. And not because of an abundant overflowing or a free, anarchic and unclassifiable productivity, but because of the trait of participation itself, because of the effect of the code and of the generic mark. In marking itself generically, a text unmarks itself.[53]

Thus one should not stick too closely to the predicaments of a sole genre as this might block a larger view of the literary act, its deeper interpretation and understanding. Genres can be considered as ways of access into the literary world which sometimes ease the

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[49] Bakhtin in Todorov, *The Dialogical Principle*, 84.

[50] See Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko, eds., *Socialist Realism Without Shores* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), a collection of articles discussing the way the genre has developed in post-Stalinist and post-utopian times.

[51] I will return to this aspect in the discussion of A. Platonov's novel *Chevengur*.

[52] Derrida is included in a discussion about gender and genre in Lidia Curti, Female Stories, Female Bodies. Narrative, Identity and Representation (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 34-40.

[53] Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre", in *Acts of Literature*, Derek Attridge, ed. (London: Routledge, 1992), 230.

reading process but can also endanger it by closing it up. Derrida argues for an idea of the genre as an always open structure which, by being open, involves the "impossibility of taxonomy",[54] thus the avoidance of canons and prescriptive interpretations. Furthermore, in this framework, one can understand the insistence of totalitarianism on the idea of genre, a way of controlling and keeping at bay random interpretations of literature as well as of given life events. People are encouraged to decipher life according to genre rules, this way living in a world full of boundaries and restricted possibilities. Going out of the genre meant risking one's life in both the existential as well as the epistemological sense. Because going out of genre means taking the risks of individual elucidation.

Going from a general discussion of the concept of genre to the particularities of the fantastic and the socialist realist genres as such I would like to enlarge the view by going back to a more general concept of generic appartenence by mentioning Susan Rubin Suleiman's work on what she called "authoritative fiction" in the book with the same name. She pays close attention to a genre given the name of "roman a these". This is a genre which designates a

> novel written in the realistic mode (that is based on an aesthetic of verisimilitude and representation), which signals itself to the reader as primarily didactic in intent, seeking to demonstrate the validity of a political, philosophical, or religious doctrine.[55]

This is not period-specific genre, like socialist realism. Moreover, it attempts to include generic manifestation like socialist realism because they share the same feature of partiality and inexactitute in representing reality. Also, as Rubin Suleiman asserts, it also does not aim at making value judgements, having more of a descriptive purpose. Furthermore, she states that the 'roman a these' "appeals to the need for certainty, stability, and unity that is one of the elements of the human psyche; it affirms absolute truths, absolute values. If, in the process, it infantilizes the reader . . . it offers in exchange a paternal assurance".[56]

2.3. The Larger Perspective.

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[54] Ibid., 230.

[55] Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions*, 7.

[56] Ibid., 10-11.

In the following section I will try to place the discussion concerning the nature of genre in a broader perspective. This includes a discussion of the ideological and the way it shapes mentalities and discourses. It is an attempt to treat ideology in terms of genre, as well as the background for the shaping of the genre in a given period.

As Claude Lefort stated, totalitarian ideology is "a discourse which claims to express universal knowledge and to secure unity and homogeneity of the social field . . . [it] effaces the oppositions the bourgeois ideology employed in order to dissimulate the social division".[57] Totalitarian ideology functions by destroying the differences between state and civil society, by melting together the political and the non-political. It dissimulates the concentration of power by claiming that anonymous knowledge governs all social actions. This is why opposition cannot be allowed, as it challenges this close association between anonymous knowledge controlled by an authoritative centre.

At the social and political level, ideology has the same function as a genre in the literary field. It offers a structure of meaning meant to shape the content of the given reality. Moreover, especially in the context of repressive regimes, we can consider genres as instruments of a given ideology, as they appear and shape themselves in order to support the ideological content.

As realist projects, ideologies--products of an imaginative political--or cultural--mind, are also "situationally transcendent ideas which never succeed de facto in the realisation of their projected contents".[58] This is partly because they aim at creating a coherent world view and coherent identities for their subjects. According to Judith Butler, who comments upon the works of Slavoj Žižek,

> any attempt to totalize the social field is to be read as a symptom, the effect and the remainder of a trauma that itself cannot be directly symbolised in language. This trauma subsists as the permanent possibility of disrupting and rendering contingent any discursive formation that lays claim to a coherent and seamless account of reality.[59]

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[57] Claude Lefort in John Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (London: Polity Press, 1984), 28.
[58] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia. An Introduction into the Sociology of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1936, 1991), 175.

[59] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 119.

Moreover, Žižek describes as real exactly that which the respective accounts of "reality" fail to include: "the real constitutes the... lack in any discursive formation".[60]

There is an inherent conflict within the concept of ideology and its functions. Žižek asserts that

> Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our "reality" itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, real relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel.[61]

An ideology is built to give an image of totality, an image which finally presupposes a lack that has to be hidden away. The real that Žižek refers to can also be interpreted--leaving aside for a moment the psychoanalytical charge--as the piece that's missing from the puzzle of Reality. This piece has to reach the surface somewhere. According to Žižek, the function of criticism is that of looking

> at that element which holds together the ideological edifice, at this "phallic" erected Guarantee of meaning . . . [in order to] recognize in the embodiment of lack, of a chasm of non-sense gaping in the midst of ideological meaning.[62]

We could consider the Russian revolution as such a moment of "original cleft" when the collective imaginary had to face the creation of a previously unsignified reality. Žižek comments upon the impossibility of metalanguage in the revolutionary process, writing that "the revolutionary subject does not conduct, direct this process from objective distance, he is constituted through this process".[63] For some participants, the revolutionary event structures itself as a trauma that has to be introduced and symbolised in the imaginary system. These participants are among those who write fantasy in order to express their attempts at 'true' signification and their rejection of official 'false' signifiers, which explain a trauma as a felicitous event. They are trying to critically interpret the event and attempt to avoid being inscribed by the new meaning-giving structures.

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[60] Ibid.,119.

[61] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 45.

[62] Ibid., 99.

[63] Ibid., p.59.

Hannah Arendt points toward the importance of form for both bolshevism and fascism. She stresses the fact that it was the form of these ideologies and not so much their content that helped them reach such dimensions. Form was crucial, as these totalitarian ideologies aimed at constructing a "hermetically sealed 'fictitious world'"[64] with clear-cut borders and unambiguous contents. But it is these very borders that point to the existence of an outside.

The function of fantasy would be to take over the contents rejected during the construction of reality in the totalitarian world, discover and use the lacks and the silent places in the apparently coherent structure in order to build a universe relying on the play between these lacks, presenting the side of the cultural "abject". It can also add to the coherent image those "supplements" that have been previously erased, creating hybrid, distorted worlds and beings. Because "expulsion . . . produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation".[65] Nevertheless, fantasy can point to a fuller, more complex notion of reality, one that is not so ideologically controlled.

Thus fantasy is always there, potentially present in the structure of the ideological construct, it acts as mediator, in the sense Žižek suggested, between strict symbolic structures and the subject that encounters them. In totalitarian times, the overlapping/identification between subject and ideology is not an easy one. According to Foucault, there are two meanings of the word subject: "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience and self-knowledge".[66] It is obvious that the emerging new order brings with it a vivid vital conflict between these two sides of the subject, conflict that is often dramatised in fantastic works. After the political and military conflicts are over, the fight continues over the consciousness of the subject.

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[64] Hannah Arendt in Simon Tormey, *Making Sense of Tyranny. Interpretations of Totalitarianism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 1995), 61.
[65] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 3.

[66] Michel Foucault, "Afterword: The Subject of Power" in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow eds., *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 212.

CHAPTER 3.

THE MASTER AND MARGARITA.

3.1 The text and Its Problematics. The Genre and the Body. The abject.

The reason for choosing *The Master and Margarita* as the first book for my inquiry is the fact that its relationship with the reality it critically departs from is dramatized in a more abrupt way. This relationship is shaped by the overt conflicts and deep contradictions that have not yet been subdued and subjected by the dominant ideological discourse. The novel plays with these contradictions and brings to the surface what is in the process of being left out from what Raymond Williams terms "the selective tradition," the reinterpretation of past cultures.[67] Also, in "The Analysis of Culture," Williams asserts that "art creates, by new perception and responses, elements which the society, as such, is not able to realize. . . . we find also . . . evidence of the deadlocks and unsolved problems of the society: often admitted to consciousness for the first time this way".[68] It is one of the main features of the fantastic of these times to vividly expose the absurdities of everyday life by literalizing the norms which governed this life, by dramatizing, hyperbolising and ironically treating these norms in order to show their inconsistencies.

Fantastic literature enacts the conflict between the two types of bodies described by Elizabeth Grosz first in *Volatile Bodies* and later in *Space, Time and Perversion*: the inscribed and the lived body[69]. On the lines suggested by Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze, she states that the notion of inscribed body "conceives of the body as a surface on which social law, morality, and values are inscribed. . . [it] analyses a social, public body"[70] which becomes a text ready to be deciphered. On the other hand, the lived body deals with "the

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[67] Raymond Williams states that the selective tradition has three levels: general human culture, the historical record of a particular society and, what is important for my purposes, a rejection of considerable areas of what was once a living culture. "The Analysis of Culture", in *The Long Revolution* (London: Hogarth Press, 1992), 51.

[68] Ibid., 59.

[69] Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion* (London: Routledge, 1995), 33-37.

[70] Ibid., 33.

lived experience of the body, the body's internal or psychic inscription . . . takes the body-schema or imaginary anatomy as its objects".[71]

Thinking in Grosz's terms, the text regarded as a body is a point of articulation with the world, a threshold "between a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority that produces interiority through the inscription of the body's outer surface".[72] The body of literature, understood as this kind of articulation, is supposed to be the link between the interiority of real bodies and their exteriority, to negotiate this problematic relationship with the world without imposing a model of interaction.

There is, however, a difference of pace in the passage from the inscribed exteriority to interiority which creates the space for texts which speak of conflicts with yet unformed subjects.

This theoretical framework continues the overall epistemological exploration characterising modernity, which questions and redefines matter and which manifests itself in the arts by a dismantling of forms and themes. The modernist pursuit also involves a reexamination of bodies, as Judith Butler asserts:

> To problematize the matter of bodies may entail a loss of epistemological certainty, but a loss of certainty is not the same as political nihilism. On the contrary, such a loss may well indicate a significant and promising shift in political thinking. This unsettling of 'matter' can be understood as initiating new possibilities, new ways for bodies to matter.[73]

A new attitude towards matter brings about the rethinking of bodies as shifting entities, as territories which can be constructed through constant processes of materialization. A new conflict is emerging between the confused subjectivities of modernity and normative models of citizenship.

Socialist realism is an attempt to inscribe the textual body of literature (and through it the real bodies) with the desired characteristics corresponding to the model of knowledge and power that this genre was created to support. The genre becomes a site and a powerful agent of inscription, and this process is often coercive. On the other hand, the fantastic, as

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[71] Ibid., 33.

[72] Ibid., 33.

[73] Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter. On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 30.

well as other texts transgressive through their language or narrative technique, come to reveal the lived body of literature, to make the reader gain access to the whole body of literature through different strategies like intertextuality and the link with tradition. Thus they point to a different, more complex experience of life, to difference in general.

Nevertheless, the kind of realism that the socialist regimes aimed at creating has often been described as non-realist. Boris Groys, in his analysis of socialist realism in general and socialist art in particular, stated that:

> The art of socialist realism . . . is not realistic in the traditional sense of the word; that is, what it provides is not a reflection of worldly events in their worldly contexts and motivations, but hagiographical, demonological.[74]

In Bulgakov, as compared to A. Platonov and M. Cartarescu, the difference between what one could call a 'normal' society and the strongly ideologised and normative society of Stalin's time is strongly dramatized, leading to open conflicts and their unusual resolutions. I do not think of the normal here as opposed to the supernatural or metaphysical but I understand by 'normal' a state in which the political does not impose its position on all realms of life, trying to create a monolithic scenery of the mind. A better phrase might be Linda Hutcheon's "repressive discursive context," a phrasing she uses in order to refer to totalitarian regimes in general.[75]

Bulgakov's world is one of strong contrasts. These come from the mental spaces left uninscribed due to the harshness and quickness of the political changes which produced a difference of tempo between the political desire to have the new order introduced as fast as possible and the inertia of the mind which has its own pace of reacting to things, no matter how great the wish for utopia might be. The fantastic created by Bulgakov has indeed to do with supernatural apparitions and uncanny events, unlike Platonov or Cartarescu whose worlds are overgrown but do not actually burst the limits of mundane 'normality', the fantastic effects being produced at some other levels.

Going on similar lines of thought, Julia Kristeva asserts that the current transitory stage of European literature (and by 'current' she means the movement starting with

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[74] Boris Groys, *The Total Art of Stalinism. Avant-Garde, Aesthetic Dictatorship and Beyond* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, 1992), 62-3.

[75] Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge. The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1994), 16.

modernity) is characterized by the coexistence (and ambivalence) of "the double of lived experience" (realism and the epic) and "lived experience" itself (linguistic exploration and menippean discourse).[76] This duality being thus constructed, the effort of fantasy against the grain of Socialist Realism is part of the overall effort against realist restrictions which do not give a real measure of the world and do not fully speak of the possibilities of subjectivity.

As an example of menippean discourse, *The Master and Margarita* is characterized by generic complexity, diffusion of subjectivity and estrangement, by the presence of sexuality and death as thematic constants. As Kristeva states

> mennipean discourse . . . Elements of the fantastic, which never appear in epic or tragic works, crop forth here . . . Pathological states of the soul, such as madness, split personalities, daydreams, dreams, and death, become part of the narrative . . . According to Bakhtin, these elements have more structural than thematic significance; they destroy man's epic and tragic unity as well as his belief in identity and causality; they indicate that he has lost his totality and no longer coincides with himself.[77]

Generic fluidity--characteristic of the lived body--is one of the main features of Bulgakov's novel. Showing the functioning of incomplete fluid subjectivities, the novel has the potential to unsettle the ego of the reader. Thus, from the very beginning, *The Master and Margarita* presented both the public and the critics with the difficulty of ascribing it to a certain genre. Stephen Lovell correctly describes all sides of the problem:

> Back in 1967, the immediate problem was how to integrate Bulgakov into accepted Russian and Soviet literary traditions. This is best observed in the discussion of the novel's genre: it was variously described as satire, menippea, parody, fantastic tale, adventure story, science fiction--and a number of compound descriptions were also employed. These labels are not only of academic interest: our perception of a work's genre crucially conditions our reading.[78]

The process faced by the readers is one that can be explained using the three concepts formulated by Bakhtin to describe what he called a "historical genre". These concepts are: potential, genre memory and genre conditions.[79] The lived body of the genre brings with it

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[76] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 89.

[77] Ibid., 82-83.

[78] Stephen Lovell, "Bulgakov as Soviet Culture", The Slavonic and East European Review, volume 76, no. 1. (1998): 30-31.

[79] Gary Saul Morson, *Mikhail Bakhtin. The Creation of a Prosaics*, 449.

the content of memory and leaves open the possibility for change which is otherwise very strictly controlled by the communist inscriptive pattern. I will return further on to the way in which both genre memory and genre conditions are causally linked with the (mis)recognition of a genre pattern.

Besides all these ambiguities the novel belongs to a special cross-generic species of text. Tomislav Longinovic states that these texts are moved by "borderline poetics" which

> originated in the desire of the writer to reclaim the sphere of language for his own, often narcissistic purposes in order to articulate his vision on the margins between the artifices of identity and the malignancies of ideology, while giving expression to the dissolution of "reality" constructed by socialist realism and other realisms.[80]

Placed on this borderline, the work is characterized by a heteroglossic combination of generic patterns[81]. The play of these characteristics creates the unique voice of the novel and is crucial in the construction of its subversive universe.

The shapes of the abject are to be found in the space left between the two representations of the body (the inscribed and the lived). In Julia Kristeva's view, "it is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite".[82] The shapes the fantastic brings to light are those abjected from the socialist realist bodily image as envisioned by this generic superego of literature. The abject is an expression of memory, it is "a land of oblivion that is constantly remembered".[83] The Jerusalem chapters together with Satan's ball are created of this mnemonic 'land of oblivion',

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[80] Tomislav Z. Longinovic, *Borderline Culture: The Politics of Identity in Four Twentieth Century Slavic Novels* (The University of Arkansas Press: Fayetteville, 1993), 7.

[81] Ellendea Proffer states that "one can see that the novel does not fit easily into any genre category. Its blend of satire, realism and fantasy may be classified as Menippean satire, or encyclopedic fiction", *Bulgakov. Life and Work* (Ardis: Ann Arbor, 1984), 531. The novel's appartenence is also questioned at the level of the literary period it belongs to. Gary Rosenshield ("*The Master and Margarita* and The Politics of Aporia: A Polemical Article", The Slavic Review, vol. 56, no 2 [Summer 1997]:19) questions the novel's appartenence to specific literary currents: "Does the novel truly measure up to the standards of literary modernism by which it has customarily been measured? If it does not, do its seeming inconsistencies and disjunctures suggest, then, not a flawed modernism, but rather an anticipation of postmodern aesthetics, an aesthetics of subversion and play? Further on, has the attempt of critics to turn *The Master and Margarita* into the masterpiece of Soviet or anti-Soviet prose led to questionable critical conclusions about the novel's aesthetics, politics and ethics?"

[82] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.

[83] Ibid., 8.

they are part of the abjected which is brought into conscious being by the Master and Margarita, who thus makes themselves abjected.

The Jerusalem chapters are part of the sublime content which accompanies the manifestation of the abject. They are created by the same subject who used to be part of a world which included what is now the abject, himself included. His remembrance of this former completeness (and thus of the abject) reasserts the unity between these separated contents. As theorized by Kristeva, "the 'sublime' object dissolves in the raptures of a bottomless memory . . . the sublime is a something added that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be both here, as dejects, and there, as others and sparkling".[84] Both the Master and Margarita are characterized by this duality of presence. They are dejected by the world but they reassert their presence in a realm where they are reunited with a possibility to complete their selves. Thus "Abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death. . . It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new signifiance".[85]

There is also a different meaning of abjection provided by Judith Butler, who theorizes it from the point of view of the construction of subjectivities. For Butler,

> the abject designates . . . precisely those 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the 'unlivable' is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject.[86]

Thus the subject, constituted through this process of exclusion and opposition, needs these borders in order to define itself and its territories. Characters in the novel renounce their status as subjects because they are pushed to enter liminality and abjection because they do not want to redefine their subjectivity according to the new cartographies.

The difficulty of explaining the link between the two levels of the novel has been fully elaborated on in a number of academic works that attempt to tackle the problem.[87] The play

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[84] Ibid., 12.

[85] Ibid., 15.

[86] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 3.

[87] For example, Laura D. Weeks in "Hebraic Antecedents in the Master and Margarita. Woland and Company Revisited", Slavic Review, vol.42, number 2 (Summer 1984), tries to give unity to the work by insisting on the Hebraic origin of the character patterns. Longinovic explains it with the help of Rita Gulliani's observation that this duality follows the pattern of the Ukrainian popular puppet theatre called vertep. (Longinovic, 38)

between the different kinds of inscriptions at work in the novel and the forms of transgression relative to them is so complex that the result is a composite assembly of meanings which are ready to take on another "living" shape under the agency of the reader.

There is a kind of trick at work in novels like Bulgakov's. They play upon the memory of the genre, the memory of the reader but also upon the horizon of expectation that has not been yet perverted. This is because, as a half-conscious mental structure, the horizon of expectation is created in time and it takes time to replace and reform, especially among the intelligensia. Although the genre formally has changed, the old horizon of expectation might still exist, thus enabling the reader to recognize the changes and react to them critically--to enliven his/her perception.

When called up from memory, the meaning of a signifier which is not purely denotative--and fiction (especially subversive fiction) makes use of connotative rather than denotative signifiers--comes back embedded within a context. Here it is where the socialist realist attempt at changing the meanings of words can fail. Because, as Wolfgang Iser states, the choice of context is up to the reader:

> The fact of recall marks the limit to which the linguistic sign can be effective, for the words in the text can only denote a reference, and not its context: the connection with context is established by the retentive mind of the reader. The extent and the nature of this recalled context are beyond the control of the linguistic sign . . . if the reference invoked is embedded in a context . . . clearly, it can be viewed from a point outside itself.[88]

Besides introducing new signifiers in order to describe a reality that has radically changed, given the fact that one cannot create a completely new language, a narrative has to use old signifiers. Although the linguistic authorities aim at erasing whatever does not suit their purposes in the given meaning, they cannot fully eliminate the "traditional" sense of a word, the context the user associates it with when recalling it from memory.[89]

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[88] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 116.

[89] I disagree with the views asserting that Soviet language is so prescriptive that decoding becomes an automatic process. This kind of view is expressed for example by Irina Gutkin in "Transformations of the Occult in Stalin's Time" in *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture*, Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 245. She asserts that "Such a system of linguistic bondage not only ensured unambiguous legibility of political messages but also fostered automatization of the decoding process by their mass consumers".As Andrey Sinyavsky stated, the speakers have, for example, developed a technique of reading between the lines of the official language, escaping to some extent the trappings of the

The novel, ironically but at the same time tragically, plays upon the attempt of the Soviet authorities to recreate the world and together with it literature from completely new assumptions ignoring the whole of cultural history. The work uses as a starting point the world as it was, with its new outlook, and tests it through the introduction of uncanny figures belonging to a previous order of the mind.

Generically speaking, the use of the fantastic seems to mark one more estrangement from the realist mode, thus making the novel seemingly set two steps away from the most advanced realist model. However, the fantastic, although apparently it marks a move away form the world of mimesis, is--as will be argued further on--only a forceful return to the representation of a previous state of normality, and to a more complete notion of reality than the one envisaged by Socialist realism. The fantastic includes the side of the abject and affirms it. Using realism only as a "medium for the promulgation of attitudes"[90] is a way of obstructing reality, not of describing it objectively. The temptation of such simplification is great:

> to be false, Realism doesn't, in the perspective before us, need to be 'seeking to sell' anything more partisan than 'natural commonsense truth'. By the very force of its creditable illusionistic processes, it may impose on the reader's consciousness otiose and indurate ways not only of seeing but of *looking* at things and of interpreting and acting upon things.[91]

Going back to a previous assertion that the memory of genres cannot be erased, I argue that the collective and cultural memory cannot be forgotten, annulled in such a short, even though extremely convulsive, period, no matter how radical is the opposing representation of the world. Vladimir Tismaneanu in his analysis of Soviet culture stated that Stalinism tried hard to eliminate the temptations of memory, this time going against the grain of Marx's philosophy.[92] But memory, in relation to the mind as well as the body, acts

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wooden language (Andrey Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization. A Cultural History* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1988).

[90] Cristopher Nash, *World Postmodern Fiction. A Guide* (London: Longman ,1992), 43.

[91] Ibid., 43.

[92] Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Mizeria Utopiei. Criza Ideologiei Marxiste in Europa Rasariteana* (Iasi: Polirom, 1997), 38. He also adds that later Marxists like Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin believed in the force of memory and remembrance, rejecting the harsh reality principle as it was described by the political leaders.

in a way that subverts the authoritarian pursuits. In bodily terms, memory recalls the presence of the missing parts of reality, in the same way as a phantom limb is felt long after it had been removed.[93]

Bulgakov's novel plays a lot upon these forgotten-remembered signifiers, upon the ability of people to forget in order to adapt to a new order of things. One of the most obvious examples is the way Woland's presence is perceived. The appearance of the devil in Moscow is presented in a traditional manner. Some people recognize these patterns and manage to behave accordingly, sometimes using this force for their benefit, but others are not. In the novel, the Master comments upon this strange forgetfulness that seems to affect some people, making them unable to recognize plain cultural signs:

> 'As soon as you started describing him,' the guest went on, 'I began to realize who it was that you had the pleasure of talking with yesterday. And, really, I'm surprised at Berlioz! Now you, of course, are a virginal person,' here the guest apologized again, 'but that one, from what I've heard about him, had after all read at least something! . . . One can't fail to recognize him, my friend! Though you . . . again I must apologize, but I am not mistaken, you are an ignorant man?' (MM, 136)

This opens up a question about the way in which the mind is conditioned to recognize such uncanny manifestations. The Master himself has never met Woland up to the moment when Ivan tells him about him. He recognizes Woland only from the story, he identifies his narrative persona. The question is whether he could have recognized the devil had he really met him.

Woland can be depicted as the embodiment of memory itself, past, present and future. Through his actions he aims at the relativisation of the rules dominating communist society, destroying their rigidity by pushing them to the limit. One of the best examples is the use Bulgakov makes of the apartment allocation and foreign currency policies. The sight of foreign currency causes more fear in the characters than the uncanny apparition of a cat riding the tram by itself and buying a ticket.[94] These attitudes point to a kind "suspension of

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[93] In relation to the phantom limb, Elisabeth Grosz states the following: "The phantom limb changes quite dramatically over time. The closer in time to the amputation, the more realistic is its appearance and (usually but not always) the more painful are the sensations coming from it; the greater the passage of time since the amputation, the more distorted and phantomlike the sensations become. . . The patient is perplexed because he has two simultaneous experiences which are equally real to him: on one hand, the 'reality' of the phantom sensations; on the other, the perceptual reality of the experiences of the stump". *Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 73-74.

disbelief" which makes the citizen accept absurdities because otherwise his or her subjectivity will not only be transformed and threatened but might also cease to exist. This suspension can also be interpreted as a suspension of subjectivity itself in favour of the citizen.

What Bulgakov creates is a huge carnival which takes place on all the sites of the story, including, of course, the stage of the Variety theatre.

The carnivalesque--as one expression of heteroglossia in the novel-- is one of the sites of the abject. The combination of the realist with the fantastic narrative is done against the background of a return to strict realistic recommendations that block the access to a "truthful" representation of the world and finally lead to a questioning of the main materialist premises.[95]

Carnival spreads out following the tracks of the characters who have been touched by it until the whole city becomes a carnivalesque site. The phenomenon cannot be stopped or controlled as it makes use of forms that are part of the communist world. (eg. the choir that sings about Lake Baikal, the practice of denouncing people possessing foreign currency, the policy of apartment allocations). Many people who are affected by carnivalesque manifestations--like many of the heroes--are sent to Stravinskii's hospital which becomes the reservoir of bodies that do not fit. However, as Kristeva underlined: "he is not mad, he through whom the abject exists".[96] The whole city has the potential to become a madhouse. It actually is a madhouse if one goes deeper and deciphers the allegory behind the events. The abject has the potential to endanger the status quo. The presence of the borders of being is a constant remainder.

The show at the Variety theatre has the ingredients of carnival but one set in the modern days: clowns, masks, disguise, tricks, the punishment and mocking of authority. The difference between spectacle--what the Variety was supposed to present--and carnival

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[94] "Neither the conductress nor the passengers were struck by essence of the matter: not just that a cat was boarding a tram-car, which would have been good enough, but that it was going to pay!" (MM, 50)

[95] Longinovic asserts that "The Master and Margarita closes the cycle of writing that make use of fantastic elements in order to touch on the metaphysical questions that were vital to the Russian novelist of the nineteenth century, to the twentieth-century Symbolists, and to some members of the Russian avant-garde". 51.

[96] Kristeva, 6.

is that between passivity and participation. Carnival involves all the people present. The notion of audience disappears.[97] Together with carnival, one witnesses a dissolution of the fixed boundaries of the subject, the emergence of fluidity and of a process of "becoming other", whose results are unpredictable because the causal links are disrupted. Kristeva underlines the fact that "according to Bakhtin, these elements have more structural than thematic significance; they destroy man's epic and tragic unity as well as his belief in identity and causality; they indicate that he has lost his totality and no longer coincides with himself".[98]

A more authentic model of subjectivity is expressed by Woland. He introduces the relativity of the psychological and of space into the fixed patterned reality. Space becomes an expression of the psychological very much as in early Gothic writings, which display a distorted sense of the body and subjects that overgrow their boundaries. This different subjectivity which Woland reveals around him needs a different space in order to express itself. It needs a space which is not chartered by inscriptions, a fluid territory. At work here is the differentiation drawn by Kathleen Kirby between place and space:

> Place seems to assume set boundaries that one fills to achieve a solid identity. Place settles space into objects, working to inscribe the Cartesian monad and the autonomous ego . . . If place is organic and stable, space is malleable, a fabric of continually shifting sites and boundaries.[99]

This is why the houses Woland inhabits are in constant transformation and they dilate in order to hold the content of an infinite memory. Space changes in order to accommodate new models of subjectivity, which are neither the utopian communist not the religious ones. They have not settled into forms and still enjoy their nomadic ways:

> Here they started climbing some wide steps, and Margarita began to think there would be no end to them. She was struck that the front hall of an ordinary Moscow apartment could contain such extraordinary invisible, yet quite palpable, endless stairway. ... How could it all be squeezed into a Moscow apartment? (MM, 250-1)

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[97] On the same lines, describing carnival, Kristeva said that "A carnival participant is both actor and spectator; he loses his sense of individuality, passes through a zero point of carnivalesque activity and splits into a subject of the spectacle and an object of the game", *Desire in Language*, 78.

[98] Ibid., 81.

[99] Kathleen M. Kirby, *Indifferent Boundaries. Spatial Concepts of Human Subjectivity* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1992), 19.

Woland creates a Gothic sense of space around him that concurs with the atmosphere the narrator builds up with his side of the story. The narrator tells of various disappearances and missing persons cases that were connected to the apartment as if they were determined by magical causes and not by the everyday practice of the political police. Proffer points to the psychological effects of a contrasting reality:

> the role of magic in the novel is equally deceptive . . . feats of magic in the world of the soviet citizens of the 1920s and 1930s are in some way less remarkable than their actual daily life, with purges, nighttime disappearances, and legalized violence of all sorts a part of the landscape.[100]

Bulgakov ironically Gothicizes[101] and romanticizes upon one of the most trivial sites of communist life: the kitchen.

> [Ivan]. . . at once found himself for some reason in the kitchen. No one was there, and on the oven in the semi-darkness silently stood about a dozen extinguished primuses. A single moonbeam, having seeped through the dusty, perennially unwashed window, shone sparsely into the corner where, in dust and cobwebs, a forgotten icon hung, with the ends of two wedding candles peeking out from behind the casing. (MM, 52)

One of the most 'Gothic' scenes in the novel is the one where Rimskii is assaulted by Woland's assistants. In this scene the description of fear is similar to that in horror novels with all the necessary ingredients: darkness, people with no shadows, vampires disappearing at the sound of the crowing of a cock:

> The frame swung wide open, but instead of the night's freshness and the fragrance of the lindens, the smell of cellar burst into the room. The dead woman stepped on to the window-sill. Rimsky clearly saw spots of decay in her breast.
> And just then the joyful, unexpected crowing of a cock came from the garden, from that low building beyond the shooting gallery where birds participating in the programme were kept. . . . Savage fury distorted the girl's face, she emitted a hoarse oath, and at the door Varenukha shrieked and dropped from the air to the floor. (MM, 117)

Carnival is present even in this enactment of horror, the cock who saves Rimskii from the hands of the vampire being a trained one.

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[100] Ibid., 544-55.

[101] Gothic is one of the strong features of the novel, coming together with the fantastic elements. According to Frank Botting, "Gothic writing emerges and takes shape in relation to dominant literary practices, a relationship that is as much antithetical as imitative. In the changes of Gothic sites of terror and horror in the nineteenth century uncanny shadows were cast on the privileged loci of realism", *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1995) p. .

The Master and Margarita has also been assigned by David Bethea to the category of "apocalyptic fiction" together with other novels like Dostoevsky's *Idiot*, Andrei Bely's *Petersburg*, Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* and, last but not least, Platonov's *Chevengur*. Bethea says that these novels might be "generic anarchists, whose chief *raison d'etre* is to subvert convention and tradition and to exist in what Bakhtin would call a zone of openness with reality".[102] According to Neil Cornwell, who comments upon this categorisation, these novels "seem to share a sense of apocalypse and a subtextual dependency on the Book of Revelation"[103] characteristic of Russian culture and they might also fit into Linda Hutcheon's category of historical metafiction.[104]

3.2. The characters.

3.2.1. Margarita.

She is one of the few active characters in the novel, one who is not dumbstruck by the unusual apparitions. She cold-bloodedly reacts when she is accosted in the street by Azazello, thinking that she was facing something quite usual for the Soviet reality of those days: arrest.[105] Apparently not touched by the craziness that had hit Moscow, she becomes the character most involved in the devilish works. This implies a change of body and soul, a break with her formal life that she was prepared to make anyway by joining the Master. This involves taking the side of the abject, giving oneself freely to the abject in order to gain completeness, which in Margarita's terms meant union with the Master. She becomes the queen of the abject, a living body that joins the dead in their rituals uniting the abject with the sublime, life and death. As Dale Bauer states, "women 'on the threshold' of the social or

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[102] Bethea in Neil Cornwell, *The Literary Fantastic. From Gothic to Postmodernism* (New York: Harvester, 1990), 156.

[103] Cornwell, 156.

[104] In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon describes this category in the following way: "Historiographic metafiction asks both epistemological and ontological questions. How do we know the past (or present)? What is the ontological status of that past? Of its documents? Of our narratives?" (London: Routledge, 1988), 221.

[105] MM, 225-6.

cultural crisis become powerful in the marginal realm which constitutes the carnival world", which is one of desire, outside the laws of culture in the realm of difference.[106] While the Master accesses the abject through his art, Margarita joins it through her love. Thus she is a subject but subjected to her own discourse, following the rules of her desire. She also becomes a link between the realms, thus, in the same way as the Master, reasserting their coexistence.

She steps over the boundaries of inscription, rejects the proper, the norm, and joins the realm of the occult. She is neither sexually neutral like a socialist heroine, nor a working woman striving to fulfil the utopian vision. She goes against the grain of the Socialist realist model anyway by being part of the elite through the position of her husband. She forcefully breaks the pattern when she becomes a witch, choosing to redefine her subjectivity and going through a kind of initiation rite.

Margarita introduces into the story the force of sexuality, this realm which is "pagan" to both the religious and the socialist spheres--only her sexuality is not necrophilic, like that of Woland's assistant Hella. Also she is not the sacrificial victim, although the rituals of 'queenship' are quite tormenting. But they take more the form of purgatory than that of the infernal. Her choices shape the narrative and point towards its resolution. As Elizabeth Klosky Beaujour asserts

> the world-ordering conclusion has been made possible only by the active energy of Margarita. In both moral and compositional terms, she provides the energy that brings this precariously balanced and complex structure into its final position of harmonious resolution.[107]

3.2.2. The Master

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[106] Dale Bauer, "Gender in Bakhtin's Carnival" in *Feminisms. An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, Robyn F. Warhol and Diane Brice Herndl, eds, 679.

[107] Elizabeth Klosky Beaujour, "The Uses of Witches in Fedin and Bulgakov", in *A Plot of Her Own. The Female Protagonist in Russian Literature*, Sona Stephan Hoisington ed, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 78.

He is nothing like a typical Socialist realist positive hero. The positive hero, as defined by Andrei Sinyavski

> is a hero illuminated by the light of the ideal of all ideals.... these qualities are very difficult to enumerate: ideological conviction, audacity, intelligence, strength of will, patriotism, respect for women, readiness to sacrifice himself. The most essential, of course, are the clearness and definiteness with which he sees the end and strives towards it . . . interior doubts, hesitation, insoluble questions or unfathomable secrets do not exist for him; and in the most entangled problem he finds the solution quite easily by going straight for the End.[108]

A passive character, the Master is not driven by high ideals which lead him to action. Failure makes his give up and fall into despondency, willingly seeking refuge in the house of the abjected, Stravinski's mental hospital. His position there is characterized by a lack of subjectivity which somehow protects him because it is a tolerated, controlled lack. (Unlike Margarita, whose transgression is an assertive act.) His solitary life (opposed to the communitary spirit characterizing the epoch) resembles an abstraction, not connected with the everyday realities which might have pointed to the uselessness of his literary pursuits. He is neither norm nor living desire but more like a naive accident of faith, living unaware of the forces surrounding him. His attempt to live 'outside' only asserts his presence 'inside' the power machine. Longinovic even states that the Master is at first in the position of the holy fool.[109] His naivete placed him in a situation where he is protected either by Margarita, or, paradoxically enough, by the system itself which places him in a controlled position of non-responsibility.

3.2.3. Other Bodies.

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[108] Andrei Sinyavski, "Socialist realism" in "*Movements, Currents, Trends. Aspects of European Thought in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Eugen Weber ed, (Lexington: D.C Heath and Company, 1992), 431.

[109] Longinovic, asserts that "The Master's behaviour which is in sharp contrast with the mystical knowledge he obtains through the writing of his novel about Pontius Pilate, is a stylisation of the medieval Russian tradition of the holy fool, who exposes the moral shortcomings of the audience (readers in this case) by embodying them. The Master's foolishness is legitimated by his writing of a novel dealing with the confrontation between Christ and Pilate"., 41.

There is a group of characters who were not meant to be a part of the transformations caused by Woland and his company. They are ordinary people caught in the fold between realities, who will never belong to any of them any more but who are doomed to go on living according to the inscribed model with some distorted remembrance of what happened sometime in their life: Styopa Likhodeev, Ivan Homeless, George Bengalski, Rimski.

Woland as a character is one of the most stable entities in the novel, almost a reference point. Not only does he not use disguise like his followers but he does not even change his dress very often. He and his team are transgressive characters, they belong to both temporalities present in the novel. Actually they are atemporal. They are the link between worlds that asserts itself through disruption leading to a final *diabolus in machina.*

He might be considered a proof of the existence of an unchanging kernel of the world, a Great Signifier or a puppeteer of sorts, an omniscient author.

All these characters, affected and somehow effected by the strange actants of the story, create throughout the narrative a territory of overlap. They are points of contamination from where uncanniness spreads itself. They remain forever changed in the light of another realm making this territory of otherness an always present possibility.

This overlapping of worlds shows once more that *The Master and Margarita* is not a simple narrative of parallel universes. Its structure and characters point to the ways in which worlds in all their dimensions--ontological, epistemological and axiological--trespass on each other. The idea of a complete submissive subjectivity is not possible in its pure form. Moreover such an idea would tremendously narrow down the imaginative universe, the possibilities of growth and change. *The Master and Margarita* does not argue for a specific view of the universe but for multiplicity, for the acceptance of the other and not for its abjectivation.

CHAPTER 4.
ANDREI PLATONOV: CHEVENGUR.[110]

> "Does existence determine life; or does the idea? Because if you think of it, there is existence in the idea". (Boris Pilniak, *Naked Year*)

4.1. Platonov's universe. Language and the creation of 'Otherness'.

Starting from Bulgakov, whose novel shows the conflicts between two ontologically divergent worlds, in the overall economy of this paper, Andrei Platonov occupies a middle stance. He brings forth a world that is always sliding upon itself in a futile attempt not to destroy its kernel of existence, being itself and being other through the play of registers and through engaging the reader into discovering the points of slide, be they linguistic, epistemological or even ontological.

There are several aspects that make of *Chevengur* a fantastic universe. However, it is in the language mostly that the articulation, the departure occurs, in the frequent mutations from everyday colloquial language to the schematic structure of communist plethora. The processes of literalization, objectification and embodiment of abstract entities occupy a central role in the structure of signification which characterises *Chevengur*, leading to the creation of an anti-utopic narrative in a text which extrinsically[111] aims towards constructing utopia.

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[110] I will use here the short summary provided by Thomas Seifrid: "the tale of how one Sasha Dvanov, an orphan from a drought-stricken provincial Russian town, comes of age during the Revolution and sets off for the heartland in search of "true socialism". On his journey he meets up with another revolutionary named Kopenkin (who rides a horse called "Proletarian Strength"), and, after a series of adventures during the civil war, the two find their way to the isolated town of Chevengur. They have been told that communism has already arrived in the town. Once there they discover a band of eccentrics that has installed its soviet in a former church, slaughters the bourgeoisie, and declares the end of history. The members of this would-be utopia then suspend labor, believing that nature will provide for them. It does not, autumn approaches, and the town is invaded by a detachment of cossacks. Kopenkin is killed in the ensuing battle, while Dvanov rides off to commit suicide", *Andrei Platonov. Uncertainties of Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 100.

[111] I am again using Hirsch's terms "extrinsic" and "intrinsic", enlarging their sense in order to mean also the difference between the apparent aim of the narrative--in this case embodying the communist utopia in Chevengur--and the underlying purpose--that of showing that utopia in general and a communist one in particular cannot be reached and even a partial realization of utopia can only be a step towards collapse.

Through its treatment of language *Chevengur* belongs to the modernist train of thought. However, by making language the source of the uncanny and subtly questioning the validity and universality of representation, Chevengur resembles works of postmodern fantasy which rely mostly on language effects, the play of representations, and metafictionality.

Platonov's position is that of a negotiator playing a subtle game of rejection and belonging. He is at the same time inside and outside the paradigms he describes, but not only through the fact of temporal and spatial belonging but also through conscious epistemological choice. His work is an illustration of an overlapping and a conflict between the world rejected and the world accepted. They are both there, occupying more or less the same territory in time and space. This duplicity can easily be overlooked by considering it to be the simple accident of a mind not schooled in the depths of philosophy and the tricky language of theory, a mind which does not abide by nihilistic acts of destruction.

We can retrace here the main lines of argument we used in analysing Bulgakov. The notion of generic instability, the different faces of the abject, both cultural and physical, the body and its relationship with the environment. We also have two opposing myth systems, but this opposition is not as overt as in Bulgakov. Platonov treats differently the relationship between past, present and future, and memory works differently for him. He underlines the changes that occur in the literalization of metaphors, the risks of introducing a highly metaphorical language to a register of everyday language which is by nature opaque to abstract usage and symbolisms.

Platonov also illustrates the intellectual conflicts that arise in the age of modernism between the epistemological uncertainty characterising the modern paradigm and the dogmatic character of communism. His affinities with modernism have been identified in the deep concern with language and the distortive play with registers and style. Thomas Seifrid argues that Platonov resembles the modernists in that it is in the odd but ideologically motivated permutations of language in the Soviet era that he looks for evidence of the ontological fate of the world.[112] Nevertheless, it is also Seifrid who identifies the moment where Platonov shifts from the modernist paradigm:

[112]Seifrid. 81.

> Platonov represents the paradoxical conjunction of certain features that separate *skaz* and ornamental modernism in their otherwise shared emphasis on the aesthetically self-valuable word: the orientation in *skaz* toward forms of speech outside the literary norm (particularly oral and dialectical) and the effort in ornamental prose to elevate the language of prose to the level of poetic speech.[113]

It is here that the affinities with postmodernist poetics can be found, in the preference for everyday registers of language in opposition to the modernist attempt towards high art and hermetic language.

We face the conflict between fragmentation and unification, authority and uncertainty, with the communist ideology aiming to become another 'grand narrative' giving roundness and meaning to a world verging on epistemological dissolution. It is no wonder that Marxism and later communism were regarded as intellectual life savers, as a point of certainty and as a vision of the future in a world in the process of sliding.

The conventions of the socialist realist novel are much more visible here than in Bulgakov because they are used both on the structural as well as on the narratological level. The novel follows the traditional plot, speaking of the fight for the construction of communism (stories of reconstruction), combining a Bildungsroman vein--following the life of Alexander Dvanov--with the line of political and ideological struggle. There is something recognized by Thomas Seifrid as a feature of Platonov's specific plot structure. He states that

> the plot begins in the intimate sphere (the lonely and troubled like of the hero) then moves outward into narration of the utopian project (which the hero directs), only to revert to, and close with, the hero's personal demise (typically following the failure of his utopian project).[114]

Like most socialist realist novels, this one is characterized by a preoccupation with the end, actually asserting that it reached the end in teleological terms.[115] Platonov does everything

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[113]Seifrid, 89.

[114]Seifrid, 71.

[115] Sinyavsky states that in all works of socialist realism the end is present "either as a panegiric of Communism and everything connected therewith, or a satire upon its numerous enemies, or else is a picture of life in its revolutionary development"., "Socialist Realism" in *Movements, Currents, Trends. Aspects of European Thought in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Eugen Weber ed, (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C Heath and Company, 1992), 429.

to subvert the classical plot of the socialist realist novel. The end towards which his characters move is not the golden age of the communist future but complete annihilation. He thus underlines the main conflicts lying at the basis of the socialist realism model, also subverting the pattern introduced by the stories of reconstruction. One of these conflicts is underlined by Katerina Clark in *The Soviet Novel* where she speaks about the tension between "radical utopianism" and "egalitarian extremism":

> [the revolution] involves bringing about a more rational, egalitarian, and harmonious society, but, in order to achieve that result, it requires extraordinary events and radical change.[116]

The aim of a rounded end of the narrative clashes with the desire to reach the communist future. "While the 'master plot' was oriented toward a teleological completion of the task, the 'master closure' of all socialist realist novels showed that this task was always open to the future",[117] says Hans Gunther. He also stresses that even though the end of the socialist realist novel may end in tragedy, this serves a higher purpose, making tragedy "inherently optimistic". In Platonov, though, the final tragedy only points to uselessness and the absurd loss of lives. The communist community, as only an imaginary construct of the characters, dies together with them, making their sacrifice futile. For them this futility is impossible to realize because they had objectified their imaginary construct and given it a name, a place and a shape, perceiving it with all their senses and believing in it with all their might.

In Chevengur tragedy is the action of bringing the future into the present, of living as if the future was already there, as if they had reached the end of time, as if the luminous image provided by ideology had taken shape. This is not only going against common sense, but also against ideology. There is nothing at the end of an ideology. Actually the end is never to be reached. This inversion, or, to put it better, deletion, of time destroys the notion of teleology (one of the main ingredients of ideology) and brings about a state of entropy, thus death, as the ideological narrative is over with nothing to follow it. As Žižek puts it,

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[116] Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel. History as Ritual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 91.

[117] Hans Gunther in Thomas Lahunsen and Evgeny Dobrenko, eds., *Socialist Realism Without Shores* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 19.

"the Stalinist Communist is exactly between the two deaths",[118] between the movements of a dialectics, between revolution, the annihilation of one Text for the sake of an other, and the Supreme Good.

Platonov's characters do not become 'heroes' in the common sense of the word. They are figures caught up in a huge misunderstanding. Much of the novel speaks about these misunderstandings that are produced by several factors. One of them is the clash between registers, the exposing of common people to a kind of language which speaks about their own everyday life but which they do not know how to decipher. They often take the ideological discourse as literal and live their life surrounded by notions that should have never been embodied, objectified. The linguistic processes of objectification are thoroughly described by T. B. Radbily in his book *Andrei Platonov's Mythological Language*. He analyses the processes through which words like communism, socialism and revolution leave their abstract shelter to became in turn objects, places and bodies which can be perceived through the senses and which in their turn acquire physical qualities like taste, smell, shape, colour, etc.

> the revolution had avoided these places, it had left the fields free for the peaceful sadness to reign, and itself had gone who knows where, as if, tired by the road, it had hidden itself in the darkness inside people. (CHEV, 380)

Another aspect is the fact that the new world view ontologizes elements that had never before reached such a status. And we can here give as examples also the notions of revolution and communism which suddenly acquire ontological status.

> 'Where do you come from?' Gopner asked.
> 'From communism. Have you heard of such a place?, the newcomer answered.
> 'Is this a kind of village from the memory of the future, or what?'
> 'What village!?'--you don't belong to the party or what? There is such a place--a whole county centre. It used to be called Chevengur.

Explaining the process of mythologization at the meeting point between the common and the revolutionary vocabulary, Radbily states that

> Entering the consciousness of the masses, words belonging to the socio-political lexicon bring in a whole range of ideas and representations belonging to the new communist ideology. Doing this they remove from their position of value former meanings, unchanged in centuries, breaking the wholeness of the worldview. In

[118] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 145.

> this situation, the speaking personality tries to somehow bend into the conceptual content of the new words belonging to the socio-political vocabulary which have entered into ordinary use, something familiar, already known (either from the realm of nature and from everyday life or from religious or folk mythological representations).[119]

The words belonging to the revolutionary political vocabulary do not have a stable meaning. They are in continuous movement, according to the worldview and the consciousness of the person using them. Thus there comes to life a shifting territory, where stability is lacking in both the realm of subjectivities and also in the epistemological and ontological ones. The characters subjectify themselves according to their own understanding of the same text as there is no superior body to do the interpreting for them. The isolation from the signifying authority brings about this creation of grotesque subjectivities which illustrate the risks of misunderstanding:

> The scheme with the names of the official positions was hanging on the wall. All people, in conformity with the scheme, were all day busy serving themselves; the names of the positions were changed towards showing more respect for the work done; for example there was a woman responsible for the commune's provisions, a chief of cattle traction, a master of iron who was also responsible with the real estate inventory . . . a person responsible for communist propaganda in the unorganised communes, a village teacher for the young generations . . . [they were not working in the fields because they] could not break the internal regulations: it would have meant to replace everybody from their posts--and then, what kind of commune would this have become? (CHEV,173)

Chevengur is placed on the margins of the territory of signification, there, where the mainstream discourse arrives distorted to be distorted even more. Thus the community is "ex-centric" as well as being written "ex-centrically".[120] There is a certain hybridity characterizing these figures situated at the meeting point between literate and illiterate speech.

Movement in the novel follows strange patterns. Actually it lacks the orientation any strong political movement should have. It is more of an impressionistic trip towards what is believed to be the end of history, a trip which follows memory and desire as much as it follows the unknown urges of Kopenkin's horse. The territory travelled is also unpatterned,

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[119] Radbily, 16.

[120] Term used by Theo L. D'Haen in "Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering Privileged Centres", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris.

the main differentiation governing it being that between 'us', the 'others'[121] and the 'enemy'. This strange split speaks about an uncertain process of subjectivation in which these categories sometimes overlap. 'Us' can accept the 'others' because they are in an unformed and uninformed state, unlike the 'enemy.' The process of re-signification involves re-naming not only things and places but also humans in an attempt at reinforcing new meanings and quality to their life and purging them of whatever does not fit the aims of the new order:

> [Dostoyevski] . . . decided to rename people starting the next day and for all times, and for the future to propose that all citizens revise their names--even if they liked them or not--taking into account the necessity of new ones . . . Considering this, two citizens had been included in the register of renamings: Stepan Cecer became Cristofor Columbus, and the well-digger Piotr Grudin--Franz Mehring, otherwise called Merin. Fyodor Dostoyevski addressed himself to the revolutionary committee with the question whether Columbus and Mehring had been people worthy of having their names taken over as models of future life, or whether Mehring and Columbus mean nothing for the revolution. He had got no answer. Stepan Cecer and Pyotr Grudin were still living in a kind of anonymity. (CHEV, 159)

The dialectic of 'us' and 'others' includes both the strangers to the community--in a quite primitive understanding of it--and also those as yet unenlightened, who have not been faced with the good brought about by the revolution. Identity has to fit the form of the official papers, denying what can be considered common-sense knowledge or indubitable fact, exposing a deep conflict between 'nature' and 'culture':

> Dostoyevski knew this peasant: he was a deserter; he had come to the village when he was quite young, nobody knows where from. No receipts or papers... There had been a notary who, under the surnames of everybody in the village, added: *others* - 1; sex: uncertain. The next notary did not understand this note and added one more head to the big cattle count, and completely erased the *others*... Anyway, not long ago Dostoyevski wrote him down in ink on his list of citizens under the name: "infiltrated middle-man, with no personally acquired surname" and by this he consolidated his existence: as if he had born Nedelannyi for the use of the Soviets. (CHEV, 165)

One can notice the same regard for the group, the collectivity, as opposed to the individual, although the group is no longer seen as a 'society' in the capitalist sense of the word. It is more of a quasi-religious feeling of community which does not involve any duties toward the other but only towards the abstract entity of the community and the ideal of

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[121] A translator's note mentions that the 'others' was a term used to name an indefinite social category which appeared in the statistics of the time, 315.

communism. The individual does not matter except in collectivity, and feelings, when one dares to have some, must be directed solely towards the community and its abstract values: communism, the revolution and its accepted sanctified figures like Marx, Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg. The body of Rosa Luxemburg is a quasi-religious relic to be found and treasured as the embodiment of the soul of revolution.

Introducing Kopionkin's strange attachment toward Rosa Luxemburg is peculiar and paradoxical given her disagreements with Lenin. However, in the context of the book it is a token of the de-centralizing of the main topoi of the socialist narrative. It also introduces into the story a strand of romance and its qualities as a genre.

The 'enemy' must disappear as a group. It is dangerous as a collectivity and thus purged as a collectivity. The purging is quite impersonal, more like a sacrifice for an impersonal greater cause than personal revenge. It has the elemental violence characteristic of erotic encounters. As George Bataille asserted, the domain of eroticism is a domain of violence and of violation.[122] The purge is complete. It regards not only people but also all their belongings as if people and their possessions create a great dangerous body, capable of infesting the clean body of the revolution with its disease. This is the attempt to draw fixed borders which leads to subjectivation through the elimination of the abject. However, a feeling of primitivism and pantheistic belief remains in the fact that the other is considered unnatural and impossible to change or use for one's purposes and in the fear that the other's possessions might be filled with an evil force able to steal the revolutionary spirit away from the communists:

> Some were asking to be hired by the Soviet Power as labourers--without rations and without wages, others were begging to be allowed to live in the former churches and at least from there, from afar, to sympathise with the Soviet Power.
> 'No, and no again, refused Piusea, you are not human any more, even your character has completely changed . . .' (CHEV, 305)

[122] George Bataille, *Erotism, Death and Sensuality* (San Francisco: City Lights Books: 1975, 1986), 16.

4.2. The body

Besides the flesh and blood bodies of people, in Chevengur there are other entities which acquire the status of bodies as, for example, the body of the revolution and of communism. The relationship with the ideal of communism and the revolution is erotic in all the understandings of the erotic feeling: physical, emotional and religious. This gives continuity, force and justification to all pursuits and also involves a deliberate loss of self to serve these longed for entities.

Describing the figure of the Stalinist communist, Žižek said the following:

> In the Stalinist vision, the Communists are 'men of iron will', somehow excluded from the everyday cycle of ordinary human passions and weakness. It is as if they are in a way 'the living dead', still alive but already excluded from the ordinary cycle of natural forces--as if, that is, they possess another body, the sublime body beyond their ordinary physical body.[123]

This image of the forceful body of the communist is overtly represented in the visual arts of the socialist times. It is a body machinistic in its pursuits, as it is not characterized by a complex inner life, only by a simple motivational structure. It is a tight, closed body, with no abject characteristics. There is an attempt to empty the realm of the abject by backgrounding the former standards of morality.

Platonov's heroes have to confront this mythical image, enabling the representation of Communists performing unusual deeds, which implies the possession of extraordinary bodies. Platonov's bolsheviks are faced with the dilemma of fulfilling the same deeds but with ordinary bodies and with the consciousness of having ordinary bodies, weakened by hunger and shelterlessness. In the distance between the model and the kind of deeds required by it and the reality of bodies there arises the desire of these heroes to give up their bodies, to become bodiless in order to survive and reach their aim. "The sick body is counterevolutionary" says one of the Chevengurians (CHEV, 356). Their own misunderstanding of the Text, the annihilation of all labour and productive relations, makes the situation even more difficult. This feature is recognized by Seifrid as being one of the most important in Platonov and he entitles it the "theme of alienation from one's own body",

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[123] Žižek, *The Sublime Object*, 145.

which includes the "elaboration of a particularly literalized spatial imagery of being's enclosure, even imprisonement, within the body"[124].

Women are considered beings difficult to categorize as, in the universe of the book, they can belong to both nature and culture, they can be both enemies and 'comrades'. A new ideal of beauty is structured, judged according to one's belonging to the revolution or not. When it comes to deciding the function of the women brought into the community with the 'others', the Chevengurians choose to have them function as mothers or sisters, thus avoiding the complications and intensities of desire.

In Chevengur, though, the communist representation of the healthy working body is not present, being replaced by its opposite, an ideal supposed to protect the revolution, distancing not only the dangers of bodily desire and physical love but also the allure of beauty and the temptation of contemplation:

> He knew only generally about what love of woman and perpetuation through her meant in the past life, but this was now a thing strange to himself, belonging to nature, and not a communist thing belonging to the world: for the worldly Chevengurian life woman was acceptable in a severe and human form, and not in her full beauty, which is not a constitutive part of communism . . . with these thoughts Chepurnyi was ready to accept in Chevengur any woman whose face would be darkened by the sadness of poverty and the old age of hardships . . . Chepurnyi recognized so far only the endearments of class and not of woman. (CHEV, 316-17)

The Bolshevik "Code on Marriage, the Family and Guardianship" was aimed at liberating women through the abolition of marriage and the withering away of the family. In Platonov women "are no longer wives but comrades in struggle" (CHEV, 241).

In Chevengur, though, sexual liberation does not take place because it might endanger the communist community which prefers a sterile world to one facing the life force of desire. Here liberation leeds more to abstinence, non-physical relationships like that between Dvanov and Sonia, or to idealized, *dona angelicata* figures like Rosa Luxemburg. The only child entering Chevengur dies, planting doubts in the hearts of some revolutionaries regarding the beneficial air of communism. The body, be it dead or alive, is always between a person and its actions, preventing one from reaching communism, stopping one on the

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[124] Seifrid, 107-8.

way. Platonov insists on describing the bodily abject, including wounded, sick and dying bodies. The 'Others' are described as products of abject intercourse:

> The Others were born right from the strata without spirit: they could not have a mind, or generosity of sentiments, because their parents conceived them not through an overflow of their bodies, but because of their nightly boredom and of the weakness of their tiny power--it had been a reciprocal abandonment of two people who were hiding and were living in secret in this world, otherwise, in the plain view of the world they would have been destroyed by the real people, that is the people officially registered by the state spending their nights in their own homes. (CHEV, 342)

The body of famine trespasses on all bodies. The 'others' are bodies that come from other hungry bodies, a chain of lacks which is supposed to end with their arrival in communism. The 'others' live by remembering the warmth of the maternal body but at the same time they feel both love and revulsion towards the mother who had abandoned them and a need of and at the same time hate for, a guiding father.

> After it is born, the child does not ask anything from the mother, it just loves her . . . but growing up, the child is waiting for its father; fed up with the originary presence of the mother--no matter if it has been abandoned just after leaving her womb or not--the child turns its curious face towards the world. . and, after the irreplaceable warmth of the mother . . . its first friend is the father. None of the 'others', becoming a young man, had ever found his father . . . this is why the father turned into the enemy, the oppressor of the mother, everywhere absent . . . (CHEV, 343)

This is why they are the best material for creating new revolutionaries. In a way Dvanov is himself an 'other', orphaned through the suicide of his father and later adopted by a family which sends him away from the house for reasons of their own survival. He is found again by Zakhar Pavlovich, who acts as a guiding father until Dvanov registers with the Communist party. Nevertheless, Zakhar Pavlovich is unable to give Alexander the epistemological guidance he needed, as he himself was looking for something to give certainty and assurance to his life. He thinks more of machines than of people, his reasoning being the following:

> He though that people are in great numbers but machines-just a few; people are alive, they can defend themselves, but a machine, which is not alive, is defenseless, a fragile creature: in order to use it properly you first have to abandon your wife, put aside all worries, moist your bread in its engine oil--only then can you let a man come close to a machine and even then only after ten years of patience! (CHEV, 53.)

For Zakhar, the machine provides all the feelings and the communication he needed. Moreover, it is a continuous source of certainty and reliability. The machine can never do him wrong and if it ever fails people, it is their fault and not the machine's. However, at some point the sight of a begging child, hardened by poverty and embittered by the continuous fight to keep alive, destroys Zakhar Pavlovich's peace of mind. He adopts little Dvanov and gets married in order to keep off loneliness.

However, for Dvanov the feeling of fatherlessness will be always there, even though subdued, the proof being his suicide in the same pond as his biological father. (In Seifrid's view this is actually a failure to rejoin the father.)

Thomas Seifrid carefully analyses what he describes as "the hesitation between epiphanic and horrific visions of matter".[125] This hesitation is reflected, in Seifrid's view, in the conflict between utopian and anti-utopian urges in the novel:

> Each of the subplots devoted to one of the scientist-heroes begins heroically, with some important insight into the nature of matter inspiring that hero to pursue the utopian project of constructing the "ethereal tract", only to end in abnegation of the task and the hero's lurid demise (often by suicide).[126]

Critics have often tried to explain this structural particularity of the book through the very evolution of Platonov's attitude towards socialist ideals, his initial belief in the theoretical principles underlying it and the eventual divorce from the form these ideas took on in their political application. Seifrid, though, explains much of the conflicting nature of Chevengur through Platonov's "efforts to reconcile the idealist and materialist impulses underlying his world view".[127] These efforts are present in the images of reason trying to impose itself on the enfeebled physical world, in the conflicts between body and soul. Seifrid regards the very generic instability of the novel as a result of this ambivalence in Platonov's thought. This ambivalence manifests itself at the level of generic choice in the hesitation between forms that accept the presentation of a questioning subjectivity (rather than that of

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[125] Thomas Seifrid, *Andrei Platonov. Uncertainties of Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 59.

[126] Ibid., 59.

[127] Seifrid, 63.

a collectivity involved in historical and social construction) and narrative forms that promise the resolution of history.[128]

The heroes of the book are characterized by motivations for their actions different from those of the regular communist hero. Chepurnyi wants communism in order to satisfy his huge curiosity regarding the future of the world:

> Chepurnyi was tormented by communism the way Dvanov's father was by the secret of life after death; Chepurnyi could not endure the secrets of time and cut off the length of history by immediately building communism in Chevengur, the same way in which Dvanov the fisherman took his own life, transforming it in death in order to more quickly experience the beauty of the other world. (CHEV, 380)

The same way, Kopenkin looks for communism in order to see the dream of his beloved come true. Dvanov, though, had no ideal to follow, and it seems that his motivation was a fear to be alone:

> Aleksandr Dvanov did not love himself that much as to acquire communism only for his own personal use, but he was going straight ahead together with the others, because all of them were going and he was afraid to be left alone. He wanted to be together with other people as he did not have a father or a family of his own . . . Dvanov loved his father, Kopenkin, Chepurnyi and a lot of other people for the fact that they, just like his father, were about to die because of their restless, impatient life, while he was to be left alone among strangers.(CHEV, 380)

In the realm of the grotesque one can find the figure of Pashintsev, the man dressed in armour kept from falling apart by using a communist iron star. He rejects the new order, considering it another way of subjugating people. Ideologically, he is one step away form Chevengur, but he is his own master: "I have declared this place a reservation, for the authorities not to lay a hand on it and to keep the revolution untouched, in its heroic state". (CHEV, 187) If Kopenkin is a Don Quixote, Pashintsev is a "lone justiciary" figure representing the action of assuming the authority of signification without the support of a community to give it stability and recognition.

The annihilation of all working activities leads the community to a lack of purpose that makes its inhabitants reflexive, introspective, doubtful, once again going against the grain of the model of the socialist realist hero. This exaggerated preoccupation with the

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[128] Ibid., 71-72.

inner life leads to an inference of truth which, however, is hardly admitted, and even then only in dreams or in solitude. It is in a dream that Kopenkin has the vision of Rosa Luxemburg's true fate and of his inability to stop that fate from unrolling. All these characters analyse the world and interpret it through their own vision, and on the narrative level they are used as "reflectors". In the context of Chevengur this gives rise to a multi-layered epistemology and to different generic impulses which are supposed to follow the life of each character. The result of this negotiation leads to the creation of a hybrid genre.

4.3. Generic possibilities.

The novel has been described as belonging to several genres, being characterized by the same generic ambiguity as we found in *The Master and Margarita*. It was described as belonging to the anti-utopian genre, one supposed to depict utopia found, the real life absolute.[129] In an intellectual play at decoding, Seifrid notes the following characteristics that might point to a generic belonging for Chevengur. It was considered a "parody of revolutionary romanticism", "a record of the uncertainties generated during his roughly ten-year experience of Soviet power". He also asserts that some of the novel's elements place it in the context of pilgrimage literature, that it has a comic-grotesque, a mock-epic, and a picaresque line.

The story does not employ specific and clear fantastic figures and images, thus making Platonov's fantastic much closer to the Latin-American magical realism. This genre is present in the way the narrative unfolds ignoring the ordinary logic of cause and effect, in the creation of a fictional world that resembles the one we live in, the questioning of the given notions of time and space. "The magical realist vision exists at the intersection of two worlds, at an imaginary point inside a double-sided mirror that reflects in both directions".[130]

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[129] Andrei Sinyavsky, *Soviet Civilization. A Cultural History* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1988), 32.

[130] Wendy B. Faris, "Scheherezade's Children: Magical Realism and Postmodern Fiction", in *Magical Realism. Theory, History, Community*, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy D. Faris eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 168.

One of the main devices of magical realism which is also to be found in *Chevengur* is that of permutation, "the permutation of possible and impossible, relevant and irrelevant, true and false, reality and parody, metaphor and literal meaning".[131] But all the epistemological and ontological gaps that are created by the text are apparently bridged by the narrative voice, which tries to make everything seem as usual, to smooth over the bizarre, often by regarding it as a normal occurrence.[132] In *Chevengur* the world is presented through the eyes of the characters, through their own unmediated language, which brings a multiple point of view. The world seen through the eyes of the Chevengurians seems unsettling only to the reader involved in decoding the continuous proliferation of meaning.

The favouring of magical realism is part of the modern tendency to stress the metafictional level, the confrontation of different ontological levels within the structure of the text[133], a tendency which was to take its definite shapes in postmodernism. Also the literalization of metaphors, one of the strongest feature of Chevengur, is considered by Faris a major signal of the magical realist genre, together with a certain degree of primitivism attached to the events and heroes of the narrative. Also Faris states that a Jungian rather than Freudian perspective characterizes these texts, where "the magic may be attributed to a mysterious sense of collective relatedness rather than to individual memories or dreams of visions".[134] Thus the aim of the magical realist writing is described as follows:

> [magical realist writing appropriates] the techniques of the "centr"-al line and then using these, not as in the case of these central movements, "realistically", that is, to duplicate existing reality as perceived by the theoretical or philosophical tenets underlying said movements, but rather to create an alternative world correcting so-called existing reality, and thus to right the wrongs this "reality" depends upon. Magical realism thus reveals itself as a ruse to invade and take over the dominant discourse(s).[135]

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[131] D'Haen, 201.

[132] Rawdon Wilson, "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space: Magical Realism", in Parkinson Zamora and Faris, 220.

[133] See Brian McHale, *Posmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[134] Faris, 183.

[135] D'Haen, 195.

The thing about Chevengur is that the process of revealing the inadequacies of the dominant discourse is not at all felicitous, either for the characters or for the author. The message is to be sent outside the text to the reader who may be able to avoid the implacability governing the characters. At the same time the reader is faced with a rather pessimistic vision of history which includes its own end, as in a time leap which shows the beginning and the end in the same movement.

Chevengur, though, does not employ a visible duality of structure as a typical magical realist text. In it there is only one plane of existence, apparently the only one. The second, the one which was supposed to be the truthful one, is not visible in the structure of the text as such. However, the narrative sends us to it through its impossible logic. The reader is asking the question: Can this be my world, can these be my values? Then he returns to the first familiar thing in the narrative. The rhetoric in which these values are presented is recognizable, but the outcome is not. Thus the second plane is created by recognizing the moment of sliding from the familiar, in the recognition that the world of the novel is governed by a different process of signification. Thus one is faced with the real forming effects language can have on the world.

4. 4. Space.

Elizabeth Grosz identified two models of relationships between the body and the city. In the first *causal* model, the city is a reflection, a product of bodies, of the conceptual and reflective possibilities of consciousness itself.[136] This is the ideal totalitarian model in which the individual body follows the impositions and respects the limitation of the city--which could be identified with the body politic that governs it. The second model, the *representational* one, perceives a parallelism between the body and the city, where the organisation and characteristics of one are reflected in the other[137].

[136]Elizabeth Grosz, "Bodies, Cities" in *Space, Time and Perversion*, p.105.

[137] Grosz, "Bodies, Cities", p.105.

Chevengur slides between these two models. The new Chevengurian order reappropriates space in a manner common to all winning parties but the presence of old cultural inscriptions is given new meanings and moulded into the scenery:

> The Soviet had its headquarters in the church. Kopenkin followed the cemetery lane to the entrance into the church.
> "Priidite ko mne vse trudiashchiesia i obremeneonnye i az upokoiu vi". This was written on the arch above the church door. These words did not move Kopenkin, although he remembered whose slogan it was.
> Where is my peace? he thought and suddenly felt that his heart was tired. Come on, you will never give people peace, because you are not a class, but a personality. Had you been an eser I would have killed you on the spot. (CHEV, 254)

Art does not have a place in the communist commune because it does not have a meaning; it cannot be used in order to move ahead with the revolution. Dvanov and Kopenkin, looking at the remains of a country house, are saddened by their inability to understand the use of such creations.

The Chevengurians do not relate to their city as a winning party will do, profiting from its structures and destroying whatever proves to be useless, or to be charged with opposite meanings. They choose a relationship of almost complete rejection.

I will try to introduce another way of looking at the relationship with space in *Chevengur* by using Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's notion of the rhizome.

The shape and the body of the city are affected by a rhizomatic turn. In Chevengur everything is literally dislocated and uprooted without being reshaped according to new inscriptions. This finally makes the city uninhabitable, a maze which reflects the very spiritual multiplicity of its inhabitants. This attitude can be read as an ironic look at the tradition of the "subbotniki" but in Chevengur it is just a mockery of work, a leftover. The only aim of this dislocation is to destroy the remains of the former order as the Chevengurians live with the belief that purification will lead to the immediate inauguration of communism:

> 'Why do people now move their houses and carry their gardens around the place?' Kopenkin said, looking around himself.
> 'Well, today is Saturday, Chepurnyi explained. People walked to Chevengur and now they try to live in brotherly penury.'

As Regine Robin asserts,

> Platonov takes slogans literally: the "paths of communism" become real paths in the steppes, "the advance toward communism" obliges people to set out on the road, "building tomorrow's communism" becomes literally an activity of construction...[138]

4.4.1. The Rhizome

The unstructured rising and falling of Chevengur, the strange logic of its inhabitants has directed me to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome as presented in *A Thousand Plateaus*. According to their description, the rhizome has the following characteristics:

> the rhizome is made only of lines; lines of segmentarity and stratification as its dimensions, and the line of flight or deterritorialization as the maximum dimension after which the multiplicity undergoes metamorphosis, changes in nature . . . Unlike the tree, the rhizome is not the object of reproduction . . . The Rhizome is an antigenealogy. It is short-term memory, or antimemory. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots.[139]

Aiming at becoming the epithome of organization, equality and sought-for lack of hierarchy, Chevengur ends by becoming the opposite of all these. The members of this community come together through acts of chance, through strange events, drawbacks, jumps and leaps of fate. They had left behind everything except random pieces of desire which have guided their path (like Kopenkin's unpatterned search for Rosa Luxemburg's faith, Sonia's continual waiting for Dvanov's return). Desire is never fulfilled, but neither does it sublimate itself into other creative acts. Also, once in Chevengur one cannot live because the bridges with the past and the future have been burned.

Under the rhetoric of order and hierarchy there is a sliding territory created by the instability of signification which grows rhizomatically. The community is never what it aims at becoming because that aim is never equal to itself. Here it is not a matter of the imperceptible sliding of the signifier with its every use, but a real continuous redefinition. The signifiers do not have time to become fixed, let alone to acquire a memory, a halo of

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[138] Regine Robin, *Socialist Realism. An Impossible Aesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 225.

[139] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 21.

connotative elements. Thus the discourse is always full of fragments that come together by syntactic chance and apparent meaningfulness. It does not grow to actually "mean" something. It is not even mimetic, for the reality it is supposed to mime has not been yet inaugurated. Chevengur is but a failed attempt at inauguration. Being a hybrid of signification, this community is also polycentric. Signification being impossible, subjectification is also impossible, although the characters think they have turned from "objects" of bourgeois ideology into "subjects". Nevertheless, in the context they desire, their subjectification is false as it differs from one to the other, thus making each character abject to the other. In a larger context, it is a case of felicitous tragedy, as they tragically avoid becoming true subjects of communist ideology by misunderstanding it. Chevengur is a failed rhizome as it does not realize its own status as rhizome and searches for coherence in accordance with a central signifier, refuses to develop itself and decides to remain frozen in its vision of utopia. One of its fatal decisions was, following the whole tradition of utopianism, to think of utopia in terms of space and not in terms of time as it should be. Utopia should not be translated into space as this breaks the temporal sequence and leads to psychological annihilation.

CHAPTER 5.
MIRCEA CARTARESCU'S NOSTALGIA.[140]

With Mircea Cartarescu we reach the much debatable territory of postmodernism which foregrounds theoretical problematics like the relationship of this cultural paradigm with the communist world, its possibility of mediating acts of dissent and of making communication possible between the different strata of an oppressive society. It also brings another set of features to the fantastic genre which redefines itself in order to accommodate the characteristics of the contemporary imaginary.

An attempt to analyse both *The Master and Margarita* and *Chevengur* in the context of postmodernism would not be impossible to imagine. Several of the necessary elements are there: ontological ambiguity bordered by epistemological uncertainty, plurality of worlds, generic ambiguity, intertextuality etc. Constructing a postmodern aura around these works is, at the same time, a debatable pursuit and one which does not clarify the initial problematics. However, all three books share the modernist as well as postmodernist attempt to dislocate the grand narrative imposed by the totalitarian regimes.

Cartarescu is the third and final step in my analysis, one that marks a return to a duality of planes by choosing the play between the objective and the psychological, present and past, as the aim of the inquiry, by presenting a model of relating with the world which avoids fixity and is a continuous re-writing and questioning of the self.

The book, made up of five apparently unrelated stories, seems to neglect "the oppressive discursive context" it was surrounded by and aims at a globalization of feeling, a de-territorialization of the self which is performed by ignoring time and place coordinates, gender formation and social taboos. This attitude is common to several writers belonging to

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[140] Mircea Cartarescu was born on June 1, 1956 in Bucharest. He studied Romanian Language and Literature at the University of Bucharest, where he is now teaching. His debut was in 1976 in the literary magazine Romania Literara. He published volumes of poetry (*Faruri, vitrine, fotografii*, 1980; *Poeme de amor*, 1983; *Totul*, 1985; *Levantul*, 1990). *Nostalgia,* also entitled *Visul* (The Dream), was published in 1989 and in a censored form it received the literary prize of the Romanian Academy in 1989. The French translation, *Le Reve*, 1992, was nominated for the Medicis Prize for the best foreign book in 1992.

that period, among whom is Andrei Codrescu. In his book of essays *The Disappearance of the Outside. A Manifesto for Escape* he states the following:

> My generation, spurred by the surfacing of books in the libraries of old men, was not a true adversary of the regime. We wanted to escape but not to fight . . . We chose to be hermetic and to develop an entire obscure vocabulary of criticism. Unconsciously, we were censuring direct expression, but consciously we were doing a job that had to be done: reconnecting the present with the past.[141]

The title of his book is suggestive in many ways. After the pre-World War I and inter-war generations, which still relied on the existence of the outside whose witnesses they had been, the post-war generations do not have a physical and physiological link with this realm, only a bookish one. "The immense boredom into which I was born was an ideal conductor for the forbidden and transcendent".[142] says Codrescu (who nevertheless chose to escape towards that outside). Writing becomes a way to avoid the claustrophobia of belonging to a closed universe, the implacability of relentless repetition. The totalitarian universe is static in every possible way. The memory of old men is treasured as it contains something which is slowly disappearing: the material consciousness of the outside.

In a similar line of thought, Leonard Neuger quotes and comments on the work of the Lithuanian writer Tomas Venclova, which deals with related issues and with the importance of a stable notion of Truth to which I will return later on:

> 'I know that the texts surrounding me are falsifications, while the Truth can be glimpsed in the form of traces, signs which do not assume the shape of any system'--this is the primary cognitive situation of a Central European. So when he talks about tradition, history, and the past he means something other than the modernists. Because for him these are not "the data" but "the subject of research"; they are not "great narratives" but their ruins, traces, remains; they are not beacons but tasks.[143]

This archaeology is a search for truth, for a sense which will guarantee the identity of what Neuger, following Jameson, calls the "extricating self", one which constructs a space of

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[141] Andrei Codrescu, *The Disappearance of the Outside. A Manifesto for Escape* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1990), 26.

[142] Idem, 23.

[143] Lenard Neuger, "Is Postmodernism Possible in Central Europe" in *Criticism in the Twilight Zone: Postmodern Perspectives on Literature and Politics*, Danuta Zadworna-Fjellestad and Lennart Bjork, eds. (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell Intrernational, 1990),68.

freedom by introducing a hierarchy of values over the surrounding world. However, as time passes, from the initial moment of break there occur certain mutations. It is not that the new generations were not aware of the existence of something out there; moral extrication was considered important but at the same time its usefulness was doubted. Living in a duality of values was a difficult pursuit, especially when any change did not seem probable.

The notion of outside in time acquired mythical dimensions which made it unreachable except by extraordinary deeds. An alternative is the creation of an outside-inside, a psychological referral to the immensity of the self as an other. One goes inside to find an outside which is identical to but different from the self. Inside there is memory, a potential which can be used as textuality and fictionality and not fixity, giving birth to a forever unravelling story. What then appears is a whole territory of the secondary.

The secondary is a category present in any regime of signs but it particularly characterises literatures of dissent. Its features are heterogeneity and a preference for details which exert pressure on the dominant paradigm. The secondary overlaps with the category of the minor, defined by Deleuze and Guattari as being "that which a minority constructs within a major language".[144] It is a language of deterritorialization, a political and collective act. The actions of the minor express the possibility of creating another community.

Belonging to the generation of Romanian eightyst writers, Cartarescu's stories share part of its features. The eightysts manifested themselves as a generation of writers trying to find new modalities of artistic expression, of experimenting and trying to keep in touch with Western theoretical developments as both an act of finding inspiration in a new aesthetics and as an act with political meanings. In a way this generation symbolically bridges the gap with the interwar avant-garde, whose wings were cut short by the advent of communism, never to be revived again except by émigré writers. According to Marcel Cornis-Pope,

> several generations of writers after 1960 used the avant-gardist tradition as a "necessary filter" in an effort to reconnect the revolutionary cycle of Romanian literature interrupted by a decade of "socialist realism".[145]

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[144] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka. Towards a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975, 1986), 16.

[145]Marcel Cornis-Pope, "Postmodern Dialogics in Eastern Europe Before and After 1989", in *Euresis: Cahiers roumains d'etudes litteraires* (Bucharest: Univers,1995), Numbers 1-2, 142.

However, Cornis-Pope argues that Romanian postmodernism is a follower of the modernist avant-garde not in theoretical terms but in the same urge to create alternative possible worlds.

In order to briefly trace the evolution of the Romanian novel up to the moment I will talk about in more detail, I will make use of a book by a prominent Romanian critic, Nicolae Manolescu, entitled *Noah's Arch.*[146] In his book he creates a system which assigns novels to three categories: the Doric, the Ionic and the Corinthian. The categorization starts from the moment when the Romanian novel acquired an individual form, after the period of heavy translations when it is was only simple imitation of West European novels and their problematics. None of these categories is pure although they follow each other more or less chronologically. Although belonging to another frame of thinking than the one adopted in this paper, this structure is useful in presenting succinctly the main lines of development of the Romanian novel.

The Doric marks the beginning of the novel. It is the age of the energy and certainties of a rising bourgeois class. The novel is governed by an authoritarian author who imposes a moral vision (in the vein of Fielding). It develops logically, historically, it is often a chronicle with most of the characters belonging either to the rich peasantry or to the class of craftsmen or small bourgeoisie. Ioan Slavici's *Mara*, some of Liviu Rebreanu's novels like *Ion* and *Rascoala*, Mihail Sadoveanu's *Baltagu and*, Marin Preda's *Morometii* belong to this category.

The novels of the Ionic category represent a less homogeneous world, governed by fragmentariness, subjectivity and interiority. The vision is relativist and the narrator is one of the characters, often following Henry James's model of "reflectors". The novel can take the form of a journal or confession, as in Camil Petrescu's *Patul lui Procust*, which uses the Proustian model. The Ionic is the realm of the psychological. This is the period when the Romanian realist novel flourishes. According to their own poetics, the Romanian realists aimed at something other then the mere reflection of reality or the tendency towards naturalism. They were striving for a "new realism", the realism of essences",[147] considered

[146]It is interesting to notice that this critic was considered among the most important figures in shaping the generation of the eightysts in the academic as well as literary world.

by them to be a higher, more fulfilling version of realism. The main principle of the "new realism", as coined by Liviu Rebreanu, one of the main realist novelists, was "the universal life". Liviu Rebreanu's later novel, *Padurea Spinzuratilor*, the cycles by Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu and Mircea Eliade are to be found in this category.

The Corinthian, to which I will pay more attention, represents the "age of irony", an incoherent, void world. It mimics and parodies the main attitudes towards the world, its dominant values being political. Here, unlike in the other categories, sexuality governs, although it may be politicised or overturned. The Corinthian deals with the ludic, the mask. Its form can be symbolic or allegoric, characterised by a confusion between the subject and the object. The Corinthian novel is characterised by "the absence of realist strategies, the use of oneiric and poetic visions"[148] which point to a mythical or allegorical reading or reveal the conventions of writing.

This is the category of the minor writers belonging to different ages, of the fantasists, the misfits and of the avantgarde. It is the age of Urmuz, of Tudor Arghezi and Mateiu Caragiale. Sadoveanu's novel *Creanga de aur* also belongs to this category. Corinthian novels experiment with language, playing with the absurd like Urmuz, or with the historical layers of signification and connotation as in M. Caragiale. Epistemological ambiguity is one of their strongest characteristics, followed by generic uncertainty. Manolescu says about the heroes in Mateiu Caragiale: "There is nothing truly retrospective in their confessions, nothing analytical: sense is just projected. They project themselves into narratives, they do not introspect themselves; they imagine their biography, do not evoke it".[149] Corinthian novels reinvent the novelistic modality of "telling" as opposed to that of "representing", characteristic of realist novels.

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[147] Liviu Petrescu, *Poetica Postmodernismului* (Pitesti: Paralela 45, 1996), 48.

[148] Manolescu, 596.

[149] Ibid., 595.

5.1. The Postmodern Background

Brian McHale argues that the main characteristic of postmodernist poetics is the introduction of the "ontological flicker", the realization of a possible multiplicity of worlds. He calls this feature "the dominant", a term borrowed from Roman Jakobson. This ontological dominant backgrounds but does not eliminate the epistemological one, characterising modernism. Postmodernism's relationship with modernism has for long been a debatable one. As Linda Hutcheon carefully summarises:

> some critics see postmodernism as raising the same kinds of issues as modernism: investigating the cultural assumptions underlying our models of history (Josipovics) or challenging the entire western humanistic tradition (Spanos). Other argue that the ironic distance that modernism sets up between art and audience is, in fact, intensified in postmodernism's "double-distancing" (Hayman). For others, postmodern fiction completes modernism's break with traditional realism and bourgeois rationalism (Graff).[150]

With the advent of postmodern rhetoric, the critic is in a position to question the existence of genre in general and of the fantastic in particular. As McHale notices: "Postmodernist fiction has close affinities with the genre of the fantastic. It is able to draw upon the fantastic in this way because the fantastic genre . . . is governed by the ontological dominant".[151] At the same time, Todorov takes a different position by stating that with Kafka one can notice the disappearance of the fantastic in the XX century. This is due to the fact that the possibility of producing the fantastic effect is dependent upon the possibility of representing the real, something which is disabled in postmodernist poetics.[152] McHale comes to contradict Todorov's position by affirming that fantasy is co-opted as one more strategy for problematizing interpretation and representation.

An important element for the analysis is to see how postmodernist poetics modifies itself in order to face the communist reality and the demands of an aesthetics which wants to critically expose this reality. Postmodernism, by its insistence on metatextuality, has the

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[150] Linda Hutcheon, 51.

[151] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1989), 74.

[152] Tzvetan Todorov, in McHale, idem, 74.

ability to reveal the workings of a specific system--this being a feature which does not make it very popular with the dogmatic ideology of communism. Postmodernism believes that meaning is our creation, a point which tends to be hidden by the nature of ideology in general. It can reveal the effort of communist authorities to rewrite the past pointing to the textuality of history. As Linda Hutcheon also argued:

> The postmodernist is in no way absolutist; . . . What it does say is that there are all kinds of orders and systems in our world--and that we create them all. That is their justification and their limitation. They do not exist "out there", fixed, given, universal, eternal; they are human constructs in history. This does not make them any less necessary or desirable. It does, however, as we have seen, condition their "truth" value.[153]

Both postmodernist and socialist realist poetics share the preference for popular forms and common trivial everyday subject-matter. Postmodernism, though, does not favour a binary way of thinking and representing the world and fixed definitions and hierarchies and tends to reveal its signifying practices. It leaves place for multiplicity and ambiguity, features which again do not fit the communist paradigm. Postmodernism stands against the ideas of certainty, authority, unity, system, universalization, centre, teleology and hierarchy which are consubstantial to totalitarianism. Its narratives are not closed, in a traditional sense. They have multiple endings or self-chosen closures.

One of the elements which do not however fit into the uses of postmodernism in totalitarianism is the idea of suspension of judgement. In communism, postmodernism involves judgement. It is used as judgement, being a roundabout way of questioning dominant values. Moreover, it cannot do away with certain stable values, among which freedom and truth are high ranking. "It seems that the only way of living under totalitarianism, for Central Europeans, is to create a hierarchy of values where the central position is occupied by the notion of Truth", says Leonard Neuger[154]. This insistence on truth implies the existence of certain moral and ethical values which cannot be done away with. In the context of Romanian postmodernism issues of race, gender and class are backgrounded by the concern for universal liberties. Thus the idea of subjectivity is more unitary than in the western postmodernist poetics because it does not tend to contextualize

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[153] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1995), 43.

[154] Neuger, 67.

itself and be constructed on race, gender or class-related principles. Also one cannot easily support Foucault's belief that power is not solely an outside agency but transmits itself through myriad networks. In totalitarianism power is outside, first and foremost, and only then it acts from within, as a self-imposed act of censure. Thus it is not easy to background the notion of the real, as it acts as a modality of differentiation from the political simulacrum.

Linda Hutcheon lists the points in which Western Marxism--as the paradigm closest in spirit with the communist ideology and closest in space with postmodernism--and the latter meet. They are

> both engaged in contextualized institutional critique. But postmodern art also sees itself as institutionalized and thus deeply implicated in the logic of bourgeois society . . Postmodernism is actually materialist in a sense that Marxism is sometimes not: it implies an anti-idealist distinction between the real past and the past as object of knowledge. It is also materialist . . . in that it presents literature, for instance, as the result of particular discursive practices operative in culture.[155]

5.2. Romanian Postmodernism

> "Thus, postmodernism for me is not a mere concept but a true necessity" (Mircea Cartarescu)

The term postmodernism makes its appearance in Romanian letters through the eightysts. The main features of their poetics, according to Liviu Petrescu, were an early preference for short prose (which later was given up for the genre of the novel), an interest in the poetics of everyday life and a praising of the ephemeral.

While the official rhetoric was treating postmodernism as one more manifestation of the decrepit capitalist system, young writers were using its poetics to express new meanings, to free language from its ideological restrictions. It was an easier task, stylistically, because socialist realist aesthetics had been giving way to a kind of realism that was close in its manifestations to classical realism. Mainstream aesthetics required a true depiction of life and had its favourite subject-matter, like the life of the peasantry and of the working class.

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[155] Hutcheon, 213.

There was a double mechanism at work. Initially, postmodernism was accepted by the authorities because it was an apparently realist genre, dealing with the issues of everyday life and counterpoising the experimentalist features of modernism. Later its subversive potentials were discovered probably in the ironic features that such texts might present and in the use of simulacrum, a close representation of the political scene. Thus a whole campaign was waged in 1969-71 and at the beginning of the 80s against experimental groups of writers.

Marcel Cornis-Pope describes the contemporary development of Romanian literature in the following way:

> Inspired by the interwar models of the avant-garde and by the postmodern turns of textuality, the experimental literature of the last two decades confronted the paternalistic-ethnocentric underpinnings of Ceausescu's power. In turn hyperrealistic and antirealistic . . . this new wave literature foregrounded the subtle relationship between cultural representation and control, using intricate textual filters to highlight the processes that construct symbolical systems and fantasy-worlds.[156]

He also points to an important role played by the critics who, trying to protect writers going outside the accepted paths, started debates around issues such as the limits of realism and nationalism as creative paradigms. Their main opponents proved to be the group called the "protochronists", "traditionalists looking for Romanian anticipations of Western developments", adepts of isolationism and promoters of nationalistic values. According to Andrei Marga:

> The Protochronists' promoters explicitly praise the fact that after the early terrible period of dictatorship, the originality of Romanian culture was at last being seriously considered, and they programmatically opposed what bothers them most, that is, the severe criticism of traditionalism launched by Eugen Lovinescu in defence of Romania's 'synchronisation' with Western civilisation.[157]

Cartarescu himself, at a conference held last year at the Central European University in Budapest, was taking a paradoxical position in the sense that it contradicted the usual but productive image of the writer in communist times trying to fight the regime in every possible way. He stated that he did not care whether he was surrounded by an oppressive

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[156] Cornis-Pope, 142.

[157] Andrei Marga, "Cultural and Political Trends in Romania Before and After 1989", in *Philosophy in the Eastern Transition* (Cluj: Biblioteca Apostrof, 1995), 211.

environment or not because the world he belonged to was a different one, an imaginary land of writers and books where he felt free to experiment. This is a way of brushing aside a new but already worn out common-place in dealing with the relationship between writers and communism: that of presenting the dissenting individual, always in search of means to tell the truth, and always marginalized and censored. Cartarescu does not want to play the role patterned by the critics, be they Eastern European of Western, of the Eastern European writer who has finally defeated the system now telling the story of his resistance. This is also the message of his works: there is always a place one can go to escape, and most often that place is part and parcel of oneself.

His stories do not speak about politics, but it is this stubborn avoidance of the political subject matter in an age overflowing with it that attracts our attention. Everyday communist reality is a starting point for each story in this volume. But they evolve in such a way that they never return to that reality, because starting to travel through different territories makes the characters numb to the calls of reality.

Generically these stories could easily fit into the notion of magical realism as decribed in the previous chapter. But the postmodern context makes the idea of genre less powerful.

5.3. The stories. "The Russian Roulette Player"

This opening story reveals the process of writing personal history and reinstitutes the notion of the textuality of history. An old writer is writing his last story in an exegi monumentum attempt to defy death. His attempt at telling a true story (mimetism after all?) is, in his view, a way of trying to find the links with reality broken by his former embedding into fiction making. It is not, though, the story of his life but the story of a famous Russian roulette player whose deeds he witnessed at one point in his life. The tense life of this character seems to him to carry a higher power which draws in the web of immortality all human beings witnessing it, especially the writer who dares to tell the awful story. He chooses this character because they share the desire to somehow defy death.

He does not consider what he writes now to be literature but its very opposite: truth.

> From the very lines you start unravelling on paper, in the hand that holds the pen there enters, as in a glove, a strange malicious hand, and your mirror image runs away like quick silver, so that from its particles the Spider is woven, or the Worm . . . or the Unicorn or the God, when you actually wanted to simply talk about yourself. (NOST, 7)

Finally he realises that he cannot escape literature, that he himself is a character created by himself, and that only as a character will he be able to survive himself. It is textuality that creates, explains and gives him immortality, and only in textuality can he give a coherent form to his self. And, ironically, it is the reader who has the power to resurrect him and bring him to life, and not the subject matter of the story he has written.

This story just sketches the preoccupation with memory, self-construction and justification which will evolve in the following stories. It is a warning, which should stay there for the rest of the reading, that memory can create only texts and not truth. "We cannot know the past except through its texts: its documents, its evidence, even its eye-witness accounts are *texts*".[158] The past, in Bergsonian terms, is a virtuality, a latency. Memory is a virtuality, it is not a patterned territory. It can always produce surprise, its movements are sometimes movements of chance. Nevertheless, the past remains an underlying condition for the present, but this present cannot be predicted from its past.

Catarescu's stories and novels share common elements which seem to be coming from one and the same memory. However, these elements develop in different directions. They are fictionalized and distorted. Looking at this from an axiological external perspective, the truth the character is looking for is not one that is valuable for the community, it is the truth of detail, of the self, one which does not create a path for escape. In the context of postmodernist poetics this is the only truth one can dare to look for.

In "The Russian Roulette Player" space is baroque, with Gothic features meant to underline the obscure world of the underground. In all the stories, space has unusual dimensions and forms, often because it is usually seen through the eyes of children, as in Rem, full of colours and details. The territories of the stories overlap, the same streets and buildings appear in more than one story and their shapes change according to the telling personality. Also most often it is inner space described and not outer space. Thus it has all the qualities of dream spaces. In order to describe it, the writer uses a language which is

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[158] Hutcheon, 16.

sometimes too embellished, a mixture of neologisms, technical argot and oneiric vocabulary. It indeed avoids the fixities of wooden language but it also artificializes the worlds depicted.

5.4. "The Twins"

This story shares with the first one the same preoccupation with the writer and with the idea of confession and representation of truth. The difficulty starts when one tries to identify the narrator and to figure whether the stories told are parts of the autobiography this narrator pretends to be writing or just fictions, games of self-representation. However, the character emerging seems to be a double personality, an abject being whose identity is no longer stable.

Most of the story is told in the first person, as if to guarantee direct access to the telling and told psyche. Critics argue that this freedom of access is debatable: "The first person narrator has less free access to his own past psyche that the omniscient narrator of third person fiction has to the psyche of his characters".[159] This is somehow paradoxical and suggests the impossibility of self-knowledge by the speaking entity. Cahn justifies this by the "limitation imposed by mnemonic credibility".[160] Moreover, there is a distance between the telling and the told. Thus "the experiencing self in the first-person narration by contrast is always viewed by a narrator who knows what happened to him next, and who is free to slide up and down the time axis that connects his two selves".[161] Also the self perceives itself as another self,[162] an inevitable feature of autobiographical pursuits.

This explains the development of postmodern fantasy towards a new understanding of the double. This is no longer a physical double but a psychological one. In "The Twins", the woman-man is writing a story about the man and the woman who used to be two separate selves. The character is always going back, ignoring the present, searching for the meanings

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[159] Doris Cahn, 15.

[160] Cahn, 145.

[161] Cahn, 145.

[162] See Robert' Folkenik in "The Self as Other", in *The Culture of Autobiography. Constructions of Self-representation*, Robert Folkenik ed., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 25.

of the self in the past. The realism of everyday life, the details of every-day life are described until there occurs a moment of slide, a break, a fissure in the real, where the uncanny jumps into the story. Childhood and sometimes adolescence as the moments when such fissures mostly occur, when the mind is not closed and afraid to take the risks of entering the gap, which has the curiosity to proceed. This is an experience that will structure the psyche.

The story starts with a ritual of making/masking the self. This section in the beginning is told by a third-person narrator who tells of a male character trying to acquire a feminine appearance. When the preparations end, we are told that this might be a death ritual. Nevertheless, the story continues to be told in the first person by a voice whose identity is still unknown. On the way we realise that this voice belongs to a woman whose personality has been subdued and taken over by that of her lover. Not to disturb the new personality which took over, the character covers all mirrors in an attempt to reject self-identification. Her former self is considered contagious through the mirror:

> [I] was asking myself whether her blood, irrigating the lobes of my brain through thousands of little tubes, will not slowly move her being into mine, if her past, which emanates from this room with sculpted furniture. . will not start with its skeletal fingers against my memories . . . I startled at the thought, exactly one week ago, when I decided never to look in the mirror again. And as I then decided to sew that cover made of rough brownish cloth with which I hid the waters of the mirror, now I have decided to make from these pages a different sort of cover, which will protect me not from her body but from her psyche . . . (NOST, 74)

The mirror is always a reminder that the self created is just an illusion, that there is a reality in spite of all attempts at covering it up. The character ends in a mental hospital, in the ward for women. Insitutionalization makes it easier for the reader to infer the identity of the teller. Like the hospital in Bulgakov, this ward is again the territory of the abject. The patients have grotesque, deformed bodies and strange psychological diseases. This environment does not stop the character from unravelling her/his story. The character, telling the story of his life, starts by telling it from the perspective of his male self. The story points to several moments in their biography when the two characters felt "like one", identified with each other, overlapping to the point of identification. The myth of identification through love becomes awfully literal. At the moment when selves overlap the narrative voice changes, the narrator is no longer the male character but the female. It is a

conscious change though, a willing submission to the other voice. The final decision is to mime normality, to respond to the bodily-identity of womanhood. The end is narrated again in the third person, telling about the woman's suicide. We never know what happened to the other body, the male one, and this ambiguity seems to confirm the facts of the story. However, one remembers the beginning, the apparent fictional suicide of a male with a female personality. Could this be the male body taken over by the woman's personality? Only the third-person narrator knows, and his function lies in this omniscience which points a way to the closure of the story without leaving any loose ends. This story makes the reader perform the same process as that undergone by its characters, of going back, of retracing and rereading.

5.5. "Rem"

The story "Rem" is again characterised by a strange play of narrators. It starts by being told by a spider inhabiting the apartment of the main character, Svetlana. The spider, in its discourse, assumes the traditional role of an omniscient narrator, except that his omniscience is explained by the fact that he can creep into the most intimate places of the human mind. The spider ironically analyses, as if presenting, the setting in which the story will take place. It is this quasi-character which points to the structural relationship between these stories. The young man present in this story is the same person as the writer writing the first story of the book, "The Russian Roulette Player". However, we do not know whether the young man is the writer in the story or the writer of the story, identical with the figure of Cartarescu himself.

This identification sends the reader back again on the narrative track for another rereading, another process of decoding the meaning of the stories after discovering all these details.

Aside from the interventions of the spider-narrator, "Rem" is actually a story told by Svetlana. Her narrative is interrupted by the interventions of two voices. That of her lover, the writer to be, and that of the spider narrator. It is the tale about a certain part of her childhood, a period when her personal mythology was created. In the games of childhood

she meets a strange figure, that of Egor, who makes her the inheritor of a long series of people who apparently have access to the magic realm of "Rem". The secret of Rem is that of dreaming: "The narrower the space of action or of thinking, the larger the rest of the world, that is the World. And it is worth narrowing yourself down, even to non-existence, in order to enlarge the wonder of the world". (NOST, 255) To be identified as the rightful inheritor of Rem, she has to pass a few tests which consist of dreaming the right dreams. Rem is the place which the girl enters in one of her dreams. There she finds the writer of the very story she is a character in just finishing the manuscript. The place also suggests the source of the name, "rem", as an incomplete part of a name under a painting in the writer's house, whose style suggests Rembrandt.

Seven girls, Svetlana's childhood friends, playing their fantastic games end by creating out of soap bubbles seven huge eggs which explode one by one, giving birth to fantastic beings representing their personalities. It is only Svetlana's egg that does not break. She is carrying it wherever she goes as a proof that the events of her childhood were true. The egg is also a sign that she is not yet fulfilled as a personality. She is an incubus without a definite shape, or what we have so far called an incomplete personality. This term now takes on a negative connotation. Svetlana ends by becoming a failed writer, just like Egor. The powers of imagination which she had as a child are apparently wasted.

5.6. "The Architect".

The story which ends the volume represents on a cosmic scale the act of rereading and recreating that we have traced in all the preceding stories. The hero is the quasi-familiar figure of the communist world, the engineer, one who structures his dreams according to the demands of the environment surrounding him. He becomes an oil plant designer because the country needed such people.

> This was the architect Emil Popescu. Everything else that could be said about him would be useless and ridiculous. Does it matter that he smoked Cismigiu cigarettes? . . . That he used to read everything that was published in the field of the mysteries of history and especially about the Gestapo and the SS? That he almost religiously bought the journals Flacara, Saptamana and Magazin? That

> he watched the programme on TV from start to finish? . . . That he never wore a tie? (NOST, 295)

Drawing this picture of a typical mediocre intellectual of communist times, Cartarescu also makes it ironic. There was no way in which the architect could have differentiated himself, there were no other magazines to read or other cigarettes to smoke. It is an irony turned against the reader who often remembers reading the same magazines and being surrounded by the same tokens of a static life.

The narrator also suggests that the engineer is also another figure whose imagination did not have enough power to become true: "after years and years . . Emil Popescu saw the oil plant of his childhood in almost all the buildings which were coming out, infinite and nostalgic, from the shiny pages of a catalogue on whose cover were the words 'Giorgio de Chirico'". (NOST, 293) After a lifetime of economising the engineer and his wife finally buy the car of their dreams. The car becomes the epitome of all dreams, the ultimate object of desire, which cannot be fully possessed because it inspires awe, like a holy shrine and, more terrestrially, because they do not have a driving licence. "He was almost not interested in moving the vehicle. He would have kept it just like that, parked behind the building, in order to taste those moments of real, complete intimacy . . . when he was there, behind the wheel, breathing in the air which smelled of new cloth and gum". (NOST, 294)

Early one morning, though, a break occurs. The horn would not stop hooting after it had been tested by the architect. After the moments of intense humiliation in front of the whole building the architect is not the same man. "His mind was there, thinking of the morning scene. He was obsessed by the strong and uniform sound of the horn. He started to think of all sorts of horns, those with a spring like those on bicycles, sounding like an alarm-clock, those with a gum-ball like the old vehicles of clowns . . ". He starts to research the different types of horns, becoming the archetype of the collector. His first big hit is the acquisition of a kitsch horn which can perform tunes from six famous operas. One by one he buys horns which could play the Marseillaise, Yankee Doodle, and God Save the Queen. However, the architect's hobby soon reaches a climax. He

> did not even have the consolation of enjoying his hobby. In a very short time he had reached a ceiling from where he could not hope to go any higher. He had been experimenting on his car with the most modern and complex horns which

> had ever been produced, even the famous Toyota product which could play the tune of Satisfaction by the Rolling Stones. (NOST, 299)

He conceives a horn on which he could create his own melodic line, this being the starting point fro installing in the car all sorts of keyboards and other instruments which might improve his output. It is the beginning of his becoming machine. He starts by avoiding the usual spheres of distribution, exchange and consumption involved in the activity of collecting by introducing creation.

The car is useless. It cannot be used any more because parts of it have been removed to accommodate the instruments. The architect spends his day in the car experimenting with sounds, although musically illiterate. He does this until he starts recreating the music of the world.

Recreating the music of the world in years of randomly playing the car synthesiser, the architect becomes famous, first in his community and then nation- and world-wide. He is accompanied by a music graduate, the professor, who registers every change and evolution in his style.

> The architect had changed a lot in the few years which had passed since he had first touched his car horn. He gained tremendous weight, although he hardly ate, the skin of his face was stretched on his cheeks, his eyes acquired a fixed look, noticing nothing around him. . . His fingers had grown more then thirty centimetres long. Stretched, they could accommodate the whole keyboard.

He becomes a playing machine, all his bodily functions changing in order to serve this pursuit. When the Japanese give him a performant synthesiser, he spends years experimenting with these new acoustic possibilities. With the new technology a whole part of the city becomes a prisoner to his sounds. Jealous because the architect was fascinating the world, while his fame was decreasing, the professor cuts off the fingers on one of the player's hands, which were now growing straight from his trunk. This traumatic moment makes the architect play with his other hand music which had never been heard before. "This music was replacing your soul, and, like a perfidious homunculus, was taking over the reins of the body". (NOST, 314) The professor's attempt to kill the architect fails again and again:

> He finally understood that the architect was producing those painfully melodic sounds like a poisonous secretion against any aggression. It was enough to pretend that he was hitting him to hear the sounds without which he could no

> longer live. . . To amplify the effect of this music, he tried in turn to asphyxiate, to burn, to dynamite, to electrocute, to irradiate the architect. Each time the melodic line would change . . . " (NOST 315)

In time the architect becomes the sole purpose for which this world exists. Every activity ceases so that people can listen to him. The whole phenomenon takes on cosmic dimensions and people, after attempting to kill him, exterminate themselves, and the only ones left alive survive only through music. "Desiring-machines work only when they break down, and by continually breaking down". The world becomes a huge machinic assemblage. The architect is now immortal and his music can change the cosmic processes. The car had long ago disappeared, incorporated into his body, which occupies a huge surface. His body, moving through space, condenses itself until from its dying matter a new galaxy is born. Production without cessation, without witnesses, is stasis. "For desire desires death also, because the full body of death is its motor, just as it desires life, because the organs of life are the working machine",[163] say Deleuze and Guattari.

This story, told in the third person, renounces all narrative devices present in the other stories. It is a cosmogonic myth as well as a plot mocking the idea of the incommensurable power of art. Its tone moves from the slightly ironic description of the crazy artistic attempt of a mediocre figure in a mediocre world up to creating an image of the beginning and the end, a cosmogony which is serious but which is deconstructed by its very gravity. Because the question that comes up is: if everybody dies, in the conditions of post modern textuality and authorship, who is there to tell the story? Are we in the mind of the architect, are we dreaming his dream of greatness? This grand-narrative cannot sustain itself because the belief in the neutral voice has disappeared. Thus the whole cosmogony ontologically disappears by being fictionalised.

This story climatically ends this volume by making it overflow its limits. It has artificialised the artistic universe until it imploded, only to reject the idea of representing reality so dear to the times. Representation is indeed possible, as the first pages of "The Architect" show, so clearly depicting the still life of communism. However, this life must be avoided at all risks, even by creating narrative worlds whose obscurity makes them unintelligible.

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[163] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 8.

This final chapter of my thesis pointed to one of the possible ways in which the fantastic as a genre has developed in more recent times, in the same context of a repressive environment. This environment, associated with a different poetics, allows for more complex strategies of expression, for a varied repertoire of styles. However, the balance is quite fragile, as none of these instruments can openly be used for the purpose of unmasking the workings of the system but only as accepted alternative ways of representing the same reality. The way postmodernism was first accepted, only to be later backgrounded by the official aestheticians, is an example of the way this fragile balance works. Nevertheless, the fact that the writer can pay much more attention to the mechanisms of the self, regardless of the instruments used to analyse individuality, offers a territory of expressive freedom.

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CONCLUSION.

The issues I have pointed to in this analysis can be followed even further with different critical tools from different perspectives. I have adopted a non-historical view of genres in order to give flexibility to my analysis. A historical view would have limited the

approach and the range of critical points of entry used. Moreover, considering the fact that the novels analysed belong to different periods, a historical approach would have hampered the pursuit of finding a common linking thread. I have insisted more on the conceptual than formal load included in the concept of genre and in the advantages of a generic approach in the study of a specific genre--the fantastic--in the communist period. A genre includes a world-view, with its axiology and ontology, and this world-view is not fixed, it changes in time and space. Thus the idea that the topoi of the fantastic genre change with the period is essential to my work as by analysing these topoi one can access the imaginary structure of an age. This idea is supported by the concept of potentiality introduced by Bakhtin in the study of the novel in general and genres in particular.

The play between generic patterns was particularly interesting to follow. It has revealed the points of articulation or disjunction between different views of the world, between different axiological and epistemological structures. This play is particularly important for the works of Bulgakov and Platonov, where the idea of genre in general occupies a stronger position than in the postmodern period. The concept of generic instability or hybridity becomes one of the most important in my work as it is one of the main characteristics of these novels and of fantasy in general. This instability can be the result of conflicting aesthetic and ideological positions as well as of opposing ontological views which do not allow a genre to be crystallised as world-view.

It has been particularly difficult to describe the relationship between fantasy socialist realism and reality as the meaning of 'reality'--another point of great importance for my analysis--changes for each of these concepts. My choice, that of using Linda Hutcheon's term of 'oppressive discursive context' seemed to best name the reality of the totalitarian regimes, thus making it easier for me to work further with ideas such as that of the reality of ideology and socialist realism and the reality of fantasy as different entities.

I have also insisted on the importance of the reader in the decoding process surrounding these novels, which do not lend themselves to being analysed in an art-for-art's sake manner. These novels support the idea of interaction between the reader and the literary work, they support communication and the complicity of interpretation.

My aim has been to shed a new light on the analysis of these works by using a combination of instruments offered by traditional as well as post-structuralist theories. I have used the theories of the carnivalesque and the heteroglosic put forward by Bakhtin in combination with the reader-response criticism of Wolfgang Iser in order to show that the fantastic text is open in more than one way. In can provide a tool for representing and interpreting a totalitarian universe by making use of the richness in meanings that a linguistic sign may have, on the memory as well as connotative potential of a sign. These features were visible most clearly in Bulgakov and Platonov.

Conceptually these theories overlap with more recent developments like Kristeva's theory of the abject and can be developed by introducing psychoanalytic elements in the wake of Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek. A psychoanalytical approach to these works would contribute much to understanding the mechanisms activating these novels. However, I have avoided such an approach in order to insist more on the conscious than on the unconscious processes, the willing choices of subject matter and of setting that make these novels representative.

I paid due attention to age-related poetics like, for example, the socialist realist one and the postmodernist poetics in order to show the way these related to the structure of the fantastic as genre and its aims. I have analysed the novels in accordance with elements which seemed striking and relevant to me, elements which are particular to each novel. Thus the analysis does not follow the same thematic or structural co-ordinates.

The theme of love appears in all these books. It is life-giving though illegitimate love in Bulgakov and its intentions cannot be reconciled with the environment, so it needs to seek refuge in another realm. It is sterile affection in Platonov, whose characters are afraid to reach out and whose loves fail because the objects of love are most often abstract entities. Love leads to loss of self in Cartarescu, to a maladive search for the perfect other which does not complement but replaces, becomes, the self. These differences can be the ones between a modernist politics of identity and a postmodernist one. As Edward S. Soja asserts, "modernist cultural politics, in its fear and rejection of a fragmented reality, has

often tended to create and intensify political divisiveness rather than working toward a multiple, pluralized, and yet still radical conceptualisation of agency and identity".[164]

The subject is structured differently in the three novels. In Platonov and Bulgakov it follows the modernist paradigm of certainty in the existence of a self, although its co-ordinates need to be retraced. The existence of the real and especially the possibility of a better real, is not doubted. In Cartarescu, the subject is narrated and constructed in narrative through the processing of the contents of memory. The real is not a question anymore; it is avoided by being told, constructed, again and again.

Along with the issue of subjectivity I have insisted on the problematic of the body as a favourite site of post-structuralist thematics, a source of new structurings of the self and of the relationship of the subjects with the environment. We have considered the body as well as the text as points of congruence and interaction with the outside. The analysis showed that totalitarian poetics shapes the image of the body in a way that stops the formation of round subjectivities. The awareness of such an impossibility leads to the interruption of the process of subjectivation. As I mentioned before, subjectivation is formed in accordance with a dominant paradigm and leads to the creation of a territory of otherness. If the dominant paradigm is rejected, then subjectivity cannot take place or it evolves according to another paradigm fact which again makes life in the community impossible. Misunderstanding the dominant paradigm leads again to failure of subjectivation (Platonov). The characters in all three novels witness a lack or an overflow in their inner structure which can be filled only by belonging to different territories, by being on the borderline, and which certainly does not make them fit for living in the terms of an 'oppressive discursive context'.

The time lines followed in these novels converge towards the past. In Bulgakov the past is a continuous preoccupation, probably as the only paradigm from which one can extract axiological certainties. The novel is a candidate for Virgil Nemoianu's model of literature of dissent. He states: "Literary discourse as dissent must be not only an alternative and a reservoir but a roadblock; it does not modify, it denies; it refers not to the present, not

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[164] Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 91.

to the future, but to the past".[165] Bulgakov relies on memory as a repository for the values of the past in which he trusts. The same preoccupation with the past will appear in Cartarescu, but there it is important because it is the only realm where change and creation are possible. The present and the future are forever static and should always appear so in order not to endanger the creative subjectivity. But the contents of memory can be permanently rewritten. Memory is here a potentiality, a magma-like material, not a repository of stable contents, it is creation and renovation. In Platonov memory is minimal, it appears in the way characters use language in order to preserve something familiar around them after the whole past-content has been erased as not appropriate. Memory is connotation.

I have used a wide range of critical approaches in an attempt to keep the structure open and not to bend it following the demands and concerns of a sole approach or group of approaches. Also I tried to match the critical tools used with the age of the texts, to always renew my tools. Thus my endeavour suggests possible alternative ways of analysis, sometimes without exhausting them. I argue for multiplicity and not for exhaustion, for richness and not for a mere fitting of each text with its critical cloth. My analysis does not aim at flawlessness. Flaws are signs that there is more to say, that neither the text not the critic are tired of each other.

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[165] Virgil Nemoianu, *A Theory of the Secondary* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 16.

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